
'Another member of our family': aspects of television culture and social change in Varanasi, North India.

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Declaration

This thesis is entirely the work of myself, Simon William Roberts.

5th November 1999.

Abstract

This thesis examines the uses and place of television in Varanasi, the major city of eastern Uttar Pradesh, India. The fieldwork upon which this work is based was undertaken over a period of sixteen months between August 1996 and December 1997. The focus of the thesis is the household consumption of television and the gender and kinship relations through which viewing is organised. Particular attention is given to household negotiations with satellite television and on attempts to find a place for what is often represented as an intrusive medium. It explores some of the processes through which television has become implicated in the lives of some households and their members. The current lively debate about the effects of satellite television, seen most clearly with reference to children, is explored as an issue which both informs household responses to television and has wider symbolic currency in contemporary Indian society.

A result of participant observation in Varanasi is ethnographic description of the organisation of satellite services in the city and the production and reception of local television programmes. So that the implications of television within this environment can be examined a discussion of newspaper consumption is included. By attending to the media environment in the city the thesis provides a localised account of global processes and places the discussion within the pre-existing media framework of the city.

Description of public and domestic space in Varanasi acts as a context through which the relation of television to both these arenas is examined. Shifts in the evaluation and use of the 'outside' act as a significant commentary on changes in the physical and social landscape of Varanasi in which television has played a role. Similarly, attention to domestic space and its social and aesthetic organisation provides the setting for a discussion of the place of television within everyday household life. The widespread involvement of television sets in dowry prestation is examined as a phenomenon which simultaneously bears on consumption, concerns about television content, aspects of contemporary marriage and the spatial organisation of the house.

An attempt has been made to offer an investigation of media use that is context orientated, as opposed to text based. It is argued that the practice and meaning of media consumption must be understood in terms of the social and cultural setting in which it occurs. Therefore, television viewing should be considered as one amongst a range of social practices in the household which are patterned by gender and kinship relations and by idioms (of visibility and shame) which inform relations between its members.

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Bibliography

Introduction

This thesis is a study of satellite and cable television in the city of Varanasi, eastern Uttar Pradesh (U.P). It explores the place of television in the city, its households and the lives of their members. Although television, as an institution and medium, is the central focus of this work, I have been concerned to relate television to the wider media environment of the city, particularly newspapers and their readers.

I have adopted this approach for a number of reasons. One is the conviction that studies of television that remain confined to programmes, and embrace 'textual' analyses, omit the contexts in which viewing occurs, and thereby fail to appreciate that television viewing is a social practice. This position is hardly a novel one. Cultural Studies, a discipline which is dominant in television research, now looks to anthropology, and ethnographic methods, to enhance its understandings of television viewing as a social and cultural practice moulded by the social contexts in which it occurs. But whilst the insights and methodology of anthropology are sought after by students of television from other disciplines, the comments of Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 16), can still be endorsed: "television viewing...has remained until recently largely terra incognita for anthropology". By building on the strengths of anthropology, and the best of other television studies, I hope to provide new ways in which to think about television.

Another closely related reason for this context driven approach is that if we accept that television is about more than programmes, it follows that, to use the words of Raymond Williams (1974), it is a technology and a cultural form. Television is a technology whose potential is pursued and developed by governments or other institutions, and a technology whose meanings and implications are shaped by human uses. As a cultural form and a technology, television is enmeshed in pre-existing social and cultural processes, and forms relationships with pre-existing social and cultural institutions. In this thesis I have sought to describe and examine these interactions.

Television is implicated in many accounts which chart the changing nature of culture today. Satellite television is most obviously linked to huge increases in 'cultural flows' (Hannerz 1993) that now circulate the world. With increasing anthropological interest in the nature of the relationship between the local and the global (e.g., Miller 1995), satellite television has become an obvious candidate for such discussions. However, those who seek an analysis cast in terms of a strict global-local dichotomy will be disappointed by this work.

What became apparent during fieldwork was that the technologies which allow for global television services also create the possibility for local television. Therefore, although foreign television channels are an important aspect of the contemporary television environment in Varanasi, and are treated as such, I have sought to elucidate the more localised institutions in which television has become implicated. Anthropology is suited towards a study of 'globalising' television that retains local bearings. The idea of global mediascapes (the term is Appadurai's) and their relationship with local lives is not unimportant. What I have pursued here, a relatively limited and localised perspective on local mediascapes within a globalising context, will, I hope, be seen as equally vital and interesting in its implications.

A remark by a character in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* has been in my thoughts throughout fieldwork and writing-up: "For most people there are only two places in the world - where they live and their television set". In the early stages I read this as a justification for my research to focus on the globalising character of satellite television. However, the nature of anthropological fieldwork and my experiences in Varanasi have led me to dwell on the places television is watched, and less the places it shows. This is because television is a medium that is adept at deterritorialising culture but fieldwork, whatever innovative approaches may offer, is still resolutely tied to a place. I argue that an anthropology of television can offer insight into the how and why of television through attention to the contexts in which it is watched. I have sought to highlight the nature of the places where television is watched, the homes of Varanasi and the city in which they are located. Both the global and local nature of satellite television are central to this account.

I have sought to locate television in terms of pre-existing media and their uses in Varanasi. Television forms one element of a media space in which newspapers, radio, cinema, and performative genres all coexist and interact. To have adopted a textual approach to television, or to have glossed over the relationship between television and other media, would be to ignore the important continuities and discontinuities between these media. Therefore, as well as discussing the place and use of television within the household, I have drawn out the connections between television and the local world. To this end, I discuss newspapers and their readers, the local cable operators who deliver satellite programmes to households, and explore the production and implications of “intimately local” television in Varanasi.

It is in this sense that I propose that this study is an account of a local mediascape based on multi-sited fieldwork. My research activities involved more than television watching in households. I soon established that tea shops, as arenas of male sociality and newspaper consumption, could feed my desire to know what was ‘going on’ in the city. Cities often present a challenge because they fail to provide a central point of focus for research. Tea shops, as places for catching up with news, issues, opinions, organisers of events and networks of community acted as a personal anchor. But as their role within the mediascape of the city became increasingly apparent they became more than just a good place to ‘hang out’. These shops represent a nexus between the city and households; communicative hubs through which pass the worlds of men and women. Having discerned what part these arenas play in the life of the city, it was possible to investigate the possible impact the televising of the city might have on those, especially women, who are excluded from this sphere.

It was in these tea shops that friendships were made which led me to television mechanics, satellite/cable operators, a secretive television network owner, local (neighbourhood) politicians, festival organisers, and to households where I watched television. If there were any ‘gatekeepers’ who enabled my research activities to acquire breadth and focus, it was those who befriended me at their local tea shops and showed me the way from there. These sites formed the starting point for my investigations into the mediascape of Varanasi.

Lutgendorf (1991: 45) has referred to Banarsi culture as “a way of speaking” and this is a particularly apt means to describe tea shops and their verbal culture. Comprehending daily speech was a slow process. The Hindi spoken in Varanasi can range from a Sanskritic form in religious or ‘high’ cultural settings, to the regional dialect of Hindi, Bhojpuri. More often one might encounter *kari boli*, a hybrid of Bhojpuri, Hindi and Urdu. To understand various genres of television programme, and to read the newspapers, significantly different lexicons and skills were required. Sustained effort provided me with a constant source of conversational gambits as I set out each morning to a tea shop to begin my day’s work.

Varanasi and *purvanchal*

Varanasi (also known as Banaras, Benares or Kashi), was not, as far as most people were concerned, the obvious city for a study of satellite television. As a city that tends to attract superlatives, ‘the oldest living city on earth’, the “living text of Hinduism” (Eck 1983: 9), a place of importance for Hindus, Jains and Buddhists and a pre-eminent centre of pilgrimage in the subcontinent, many people considered my research locale and topic rather contradictory.

I was mindful, and often made painfully aware, that Varanasi was not the obvious place to be. However, an earlier (and briefer) period of research on cinema had taught me several things. Whatever the age, religious and academic nature of the city people enjoyed films and television. Contrary to what others would have me believe, there was no need to conduct fieldwork in Bombay. Secondly, I knew that Varanasi would offer a huge array of activities and no lack of ‘experts’ to aid research. I knew that there would be no shortage of grist for the mill. Thirdly, I had become familiar with, and attached to the city. I regarded these three factors as highly valuable for a lengthy period of fieldwork.

Varanasi is at the heart of the Bhojpuri region, an area of linguistic and cultural continuity spanning eastern U.P and western Bihar. This region is known as

purvanchal, the eastern zone, in which Bhojpuri¹, the dialect of Hindi common to the area, and regional folk genres (e.g., *biraha*), are active elements in a local identity. The region displays a sense of cultural distinctness, but other indicators reveal that it has much in common with the state of U.P as a whole.

Eastern Uttar Pradesh is on the Gangetic plain, and is a highly fertile area. Uttar Pradesh itself is dominantly agricultural with 70 per cent of its 140 million population employed in agriculture (Govt. of India 1998: 647). According to Pant (1979: 32), Eastern U.P can be characterised by its high population density, weak infrastructure, low per capita income and limited natural resources. Hasan, writing about U.P as a whole in the 1980s, draws attention to the fact that opportunities for employment were confined to agriculture and government, that power, transport, irrigation, and industry that generate employment remain underdeveloped: “according to the Seventh Five Year Plan, the physical quality of life index in U.P was at an ‘abysmal lowest’ level” (1996: 85). This applies to the Varanasi region but residents are likely to stress other criteria for assessing the wealth of the city.

As a centre of orthodox Hinduism, and home to a substantial Brahman population, Varanasi has a conservative feel. It is a centre of religious practices enjoined by Sanskrit texts and overseen by Brahman practitioners. In this environment I frequently felt that people resented my determination to study television. For those who questioned my work it was an insult to ignore the artistic, literary, religious and cultural pedigree of Varanasi. What of the culture that Varanasi had given the world, they suggested, not that which the world was inflicting on Varanasi?

Therefore one difficulty of working in Varanasi was that I was researching television in a setting which represents the centre, *par excellence*, of the ‘Great Tradition’ of India. Satellite television was considered by some to be marginal to, and also deeply antagonistic towards this ‘tradition’. Another difficulty was that Varanasi has attracted a large number of scholars throughout its history. I had to find a foothold

¹ *Bhojpuri* is also spoken in Fiji, Mauritius and Trinidad (*Aaj* 26. iii. 97); for a perspective on the *Bhojpuri* literary renaissance (cf. *Aaj* 17. iii. 97).

amongst the multitude of scholars whose work represents the other 'Great tradition' of the city.

The Great Tradition in the sizeable world of Varanasi studies has been, as Alter puts it (1993b: 127), to write of the city as having an ethos all of its own and to do so by concentrating on what makes Varanasi an incomparable environment: the old city, *pan*², *bahri alang*³, the annual cycle of pilgrimage and worship, ascetic sects, performative genres such as the *Ramlila* and the distinctiveness of Banarsi *joie de vivre*. This tradition of scholarship has outlined features of the city that give it 'all India' importance, but also on more local cultural forms and ideas. It is in this sense that Varanasi emerges as an Indian city of singular significance and significant singularity.

Given the attention that all these features of Varanasi have been given, one could be forgiven for thinking that Banarsis (the term used for residents of the city) do not watch television, listen to pop music, eat 'fast food' or enjoy trips to the cinema. In short, it would be easy to assume that Varanasi swims outside the current of 'popular culture' which dominates contemporary academic discourse about India (cf. Appadurai 1997; Breckenridge 1996; Dickey 1993; Manuel 1993), and that it is disconnected from larger social, economic and cultural processes.

Therefore, I have needed to navigate between the aura of timelessness, longevity and uniqueness of Varanasi and the tenor of life in contemporary Indian society. During fieldwork I experienced no doubt about the need to consider both. Banarsis are immensely proud of the place of their city in Indian (and world) civilisation but they are also acutely aware that India is undergoing rapid change. There was no shortage of opinions about both these aspects of life in Varanasi. Perhaps there is a temptation for every fieldworker to quietly assume that the period in which they are working is one of great significance. Nowhere is this notion, however appealing it is

² *Pan* is a condiment chewed in the mouth. A betel leaf is filled with an areca nut and slaked lime. Varieties include tobacco pan, sweet or plain *pan*. Varanasi is famed both for the unique quality of its pan and for the quantity its residents consume.

³ *Bahri alang*, literally 'the outer side', is a term for a specific male leisure activity and the location which it occurs, cf. Kumar (1988). To allow readers to refer back to Hindi words, a glossary is included at the end of the thesis. Vernacular words are defined the first time they appear.

to adopt, more dangerous than in Varanasi. The task of discussing social change in a city that was already old when the Buddha was young (as Salman Rushdie put it) is not one to be taken lightly.

Whatever the much discussed and debated significance of satellite television (and consumerism) in Varanasi, I have been wary of claiming that I can know the full measure of what confronted me between August 1996 and December 1997. What I have been concerned to do is put both the ancient and modern in perspective by exploring the debate between the two as I saw it. As Alter helpfully suggests, it might be best to see generic modernism and commercialism, and the more 'enchanted' sides of city life, as backdrops against which both are often consciously played out (1993b: 128). My aim has been to highlight the sense that there is marked cultural debate within the city about, or over, the nature of culture today. I suggest that an active debate exists about television and its associated cultures which concerns wider socio-economic changes.

Whether people own a television or have a cable connection or not, satellite television constitutes the most powerful metaphor in discourses about the nature of contemporary Indian society and the changes occurring within it. Satellite television represents a potent symbol of liberalisation and globalisation because it provides the most sustained, intimate and compelling contact with a global cultural economy. Moreover, because it is 'foreign' it is a clear symbol of external and corrupting influence. Satellite television is central in a discourse of degeneration and because it is exogenous it is all the more compelling (cf. Wilk 1993).

In the opening to a later chapter I consider a protest by young politicians against the 'stripping of Indian modesty' by these channels. In the same way that Indian nationalism uses the idiom of female shame to signify the honour of the nation (cf. Mankekar 1993b), they used satellite television's depiction of women to represent the insulting of Indian values. At the levels of daily domestic life, and of national political debate, foreign media have become clear symbols of faltering cultural integrity. In both contexts the terms of the debate are conspicuously similar: the representation of women, malign and foreign influence by un-Indian ideas about

interpersonal relationships. In the chapters concerned with television and household life, this thesis attempts to place ideas about, and uses of, satellite television within the context of domestic life where the power of parliamentary edicts does not reach. Here the politics of the household, and its members, is key to a more ongoing and indeterminate process of negotiation.

My first task was a household survey which sought to discern 'media use' in a broad sense. The survey helped to delineate some of the issues. However, this was not the format best suited to developing a better understanding of the social context of viewing. Thereafter I nurtured contacts with families that had been welcoming on the interview round and I tried to visit each family at least once weekly. Often television failed to impinge on these encounters, but I remained convinced that it was better to wait than force my hand because I wanted to get a feel for the general patterns of household life.

Many of these households were 'middle class': their male (and sometimes female) members were employed as teachers, clerks, office workers, or as professionals of some sort. Many owned shops, large or small. Their houses, although physically different, displayed a certain conformity to a 'middling' (Freitag 1989b: 178) repertoire (discussed in Chapter 6). My Hindi teacher made introductions to other households. However, additional contacts were less clearly middle class in a strict socio-economic sense. As will become apparent I have been interested to discuss these 'middling' repertoires isolated from strict judgements of class status. Discussions about children, their education and television, or on house making strategies suggest a general concern with status stability and advancement that is clearly linked to television and the current social environment and not limited to those households who might be traditionally labelled 'middle class'.

In a large city, with diverse regional-linguistic communities and a significant Muslim population I had intended to avoid an account that reproduced stereotypes of Varanasi as, above all, Hindu. I should admit now that I had less success nurturing contact with Muslim families than I did with Hindu ones. Why this turned out to be the case is unclear, since I spent considerable amounts of time in a tea shop with a

predominantly Muslim clientele. The result is that the chapters which focus on the home and television are entirely focused on Hindu households. However, in common with Nita Kumar (1988), I would argue that a pan-Varanasi consciousness, if not identity, exists and the painting of a sharp distinction between Muslim and Hindu communities in Varanasi is not without its own dangers.

I begin the thesis in 1984, when Indira Gandhi inaugurated the Doordarshan transmitter in the city. I then outline the subsequent development of television in India. This is followed by an overview of the many theoretical and practical debates concerning studies of television. I argue for a context based appreciation of television's place in household life.

Chapters three, four and five progress from an account of the city in historical and geographical terms to a more detailed consideration of how the spaces of the city and media use are related. Chapter three is intended to orientate the reader to Varanasi, and to map out some of the complex social and cultural organisation of the city. Chapter four describes the media in the city, with particular reference to satellite television provision and local television services. Chapter five is focused on the public sphere, on newspaper readers and local television as links between the house and the city.

Chapter six, is the first of three chapters concerned with television from a more domestic perspective. It comments on the nature of joint family life and connects this discussion to household space and the place of television in relations between people. Chapters eight and nine consider the interaction between satellite television and the organisation of the joint family. Household relationships are observed as central in patterning television viewing. The phenomenon of 'dowry sets', televisions given in dowry, is used to illustrate this claim and to provide a case study for using television viewing as an entrance into an examination of ideas about joint family life. Chapter nine focuses on children and their centrality in the debates that have emerged around satellite television. It draws out some of the themes which have emerged throughout the thesis with the aim of linking the material on the domestic and public spheres.

CHAPTER ONE

Television in India

Introduction

This introductory chapter outlines some of the contexts in which television was developed in India during the 1980s and some of the objectives underpinning the expansion of a national network. This expansion occurred under the aegis of Indira Gandhi's 'Special Plan' for Indian television, a scheme designed to link the regions to Delhi through a network of transmitters. Then, turning to the arrival of satellite services, I examine the nature of the contemporary television environment. Through a discussion of the changing political economy of television, and attention to the changes in programmes, this section raises some of the issues which later chapters of the thesis take up in detail.

The Special Plan and the arrival of television in Varanasi

It can be said with some degree of certainty that for most people in Varanasi television did not arrive until 1984. However, we can and should be more precise. Indira Gandhi flew into Varanasi on 26th August, having already switched on a transmitter in Jamshedpur, Bihar a few hours earlier. Her helicopter was greeted by throngs of Congress (I) supporters around the relay station on the outskirts of the city. It was a hurriedly constructed building still lacking a mains electricity supply. Yet, with the press of a button, Varanasi entered the television age and came one step nearer to Delhi. The 108th Doordarshan¹ centre had been inaugurated.

¹ The word Doordarshan refers to both the national television service and to television itself. In everyday usage when people speak of Doordarshan they are referring to the state channel and this usage is followed throughout this work. Like television, Doordarshan means 'distant vision'.

In the weeks and days preceding this visit, the local press had become saturated with publicity surrounding the event. Advertisers fought for the attention of would-be customers, and reports of the building work at the site of the transmitter jostled with invitations to attend the openings of new television shops. In 1997, people still remembered the immense excitement this event caused. As one local paper commented, surveying the landscape of the city:

On roof tops where there used to be booster antennae now there are small antennae. Most people can be seen busying themselves securing the means for buying a television set. It is estimated that the number of sets bought in the last week will have been in the thousands (*Aaj* 26. viii. 84).

People still recall streets awash with crowds encircling any shops that were selling televisions and these were by no means limited to electrical stores. A new commodity and a new market had been introduced and, according to some, even tea shops joined in the retailing opportunity. These shops all remained open on the Sunday that Indira came to Varanasi. As antennae began to punctuate the skyline, a writer in *Aaj* commented that “the whole city is in the grip of Doordarshan” (ibid.). Indeed it could be said that, as the network expanded, this was true of large parts of India.

There was what one person described as a “wave of excitement” as Indira Gandhi’s plan to ‘televisé’ India reached Varanasi, and many regarded the event as long overdue. From this day on programmes from Delhi Doordarshan would be available rather than the “hazy, unclear and boring programmes” from Lucknow (*Aaj* 26. viii. 84), and the huge booster antennae would no longer be necessary. At this early stage, those living within 25 km of the city would receive the service, though this would later increase to upwards of 120 km. Technicalities aside, Varanasi had joined the television age; another city could lay claim to a mass medium that had previously been distinctly élite.

So this was the beginning of television in Varanasi. It was in this period that television, as both a domestic object and medium, and as state institution, came into existence as a true force in India. I begin with this inaugural day as experienced through the eyes of Varanasi in order to locate it in the larger historical moment.

This was a time of growing political struggle in the country as the centralising regime of Indira Gandhi came under mounting pressure. Her partial answer to this situation was the 'Special Plan' for Indian television. Under this expansion plan, television would become a mass medium used for developmental and integrationist ends. A series of transmitters would simultaneously link the regions of the country to Delhi and propel the Indian nation towards modernity.

The early experiments with television in India have been well documented and need not concern us in detail here (cf. Kumar 1981; Mitra 1993a and b; Rajagopal 1993; Singal and Rogers 1989). What it is necessary to consider are some of the objectives of the Indira regime which underlay the development of television in India. These were, principally, that it should act as a catalyst for social change, promote national integration, stimulate greater agricultural production through education, and highlight the need for social welfare measures including family planning (Kumar 1981: 88-9). It was axiomatic that television should be about "education, information and entertainment", and in that order" (Rajagopal 1993: 94).

The words of the speech given by Indira after the inauguration are suggestive of this rationale:

For the speedy development and progress of the country it is absolutely necessary that there is unity, integrity and morality among the people...the Doordarshan network is being enlarged to educate the people and to foster developmental activities in the country (*Aaj* 27. viii. 84)².

² There was no shortage of speeches by Indira Gandhi that outlined the case for the development and expansion of (state) television in India. The third volume of the report *An Indian Personality for Television* (Govt. of India 1985) is an appendix containing all such pronouncements.

A detailed black and white illustration of a coastal city. In the background, a large cathedral with a prominent dome and spire stands on a hill. The city is densely packed with buildings of various architectural styles. In the foreground, several boats are visible in the water, including a larger ship with a cabin and smaller boats. To the right, a tall radio tower with a lattice structure is shown, with concentric circles representing radio waves emanating from its top. The overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century magazine illustrations.

नरदर्शन प्रसारण केन्द्र की स्थापना।

भारत का माननीय प्रधान मंत्री
श्रीमती इन्दिरा गांधी
द्वारा आज उद्घाटन ।

महात्मा ज्योति बाबा के नाम का विचार करता हूँ तो मैं अपने दिमाग में अपने
सहचरियों के साथ-साथ कुछ-कुछ विचारों में भी कुछ का अनुभव करता हूँ। उन दिनों
मुझे राष्ट्र के प्रति अपनी सेवा का भावना के साथ ही कुछ होता है। मैं देखता हूँ कि
मैंने ही सोचने का अनुभव है, मैंने ही जो कुछ मैंने अपने दिमाग में कुछ
कराया है। मैंने ही जो कुछ मैंने ही कि वह अपने ही दिमाग में कुछ करता हूँ।



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एच. 4/47 गान्धी एन.
विहार, काठमाडौं

अधिकृत विज्ञेयता :

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मे. सुतनाम इलेक्ट्रोनिक्स

फोन : 54756

श्री. कोहिली हनीकटोनिक्स
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ये. धनदयाम् इतीवष्टोनिवत्

अधि मं. २१-२२
विषय: अर्थशास्त्र

मोबा : 98706-
नंदा
फोन : 58754

मै. पुष्प ब्रदर
महा नं. ४५०६६,
बिपिन

मै. भस्तीन सेडियोज,
191 एडम स्ट्रीट, बम्बई

“The dream of hundreds of thousands of people has come true: the establishment of the DD broadcasting centre. Under the auspices of India’s Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, it is inaugurated today. The establishment of the new DD centre is a great achievement. This achievement is the result of the skilful guidance and resolute determination of our revered PM. Thanks to your foresight and the labour of the people it has been possible to realise the dream. India is the leader on the road to continuous progress and prosperity and Texla feel proud to be playing an important and profitable role in this. Today, Texla vows to serve the nation and...offer the people full entertainment and education”.

The inauguration of a television centre in Varanasi that would put the city on the televisual map of India was part of Indira Gandhi's 'Special Plan' for the expansion of Indian television. The Asian games (Asiad) held in 1982 are usually seen as the critical point in the development of the medium in the country (Mankekar 1993; Pathania 1994). However, for all but the most wealthy in Varanasi it is remembered as an event before television. To receive any images at all, a television set attached to an antenna on a 70 ft bamboo mast and signal booster had been necessary. In households where there were sets, people remember large crowds and distinctly hazy pictures. At the time of the games, there had been no provision for increased reception, just an increase in transmission (Rajagopal 1993: 98): therefore, for the majority of Varanasi, at the time of the Asian games, the days of television were at least two years away.

The Asiad had been an opportunity to showcase the Indira regime, and the energy and finance that had sustained this project was now channelled towards making such events truly national: this required visibility. National spectacles were, in this view, highly eligible candidates for a national television repertoire. Spectacles such as the address from the rampart of the Red Fort in Delhi, the Republic Day parade and other annual state pageants, or daily affairs of state, could be propagated across the country. Television could engender a certain narrativity of the nation, and create a corporate national life (cf. Scannell 1988). To this end, the idea of national programming had been launched, fittingly enough, on 15th August 1982³, and colour television services on the same day (Pendakur 1991: 242). The launch of the INSAT 1B satellite in 1983 would allow for the effective relay of national programming across the country. However, the first state event that Varanasi would see was to be much less triumphal. We should anticipate the irony that a moment of much greater pathos would forge the city's relationship with television.

At a time when Indian 'unity' was threatened by regional and other movements the appeal of a national television network enacted in the spirit of integration must have been strong. Since the 1970s India had been experiencing the growth of regional

³ This important day in Indian national life has been used on three occasions to launch changes in state television (cf. Appendix 2; a selected chronology of television in India).

and other diverse political formations. These were both the result, and an expression, of the failure of Congress (I) to maintain political support across India. As Khilnani notes, regional aspirations were no longer filtered through party channels but had to be asserted direct to the centre. By the 1980s these demands had escalated into campaigns for “fully fledged autonomy and separatism” (1997: 181). Assertiveness at state or local level (e.g., in Assam or the Punjab) was met by ever more muscular responses from the centre. As political legitimacy at the centre dissolved, Doordarshan was developed as an effective counter to such ‘anti-national’ forces. The aspirant national network became one arm of the state entrusted with a specifically national agenda (cf. Mitra 1993a), a clear example of what Mumford described as ‘authoritarian technics’ (1964: 3).

The ‘Special Plan’ began during 1983. Originally 131 transmitters linked to Delhi were planned, but by the end of 1984 it was hoped that there would be 185, of which 20 would have ‘programme originating capacity’. The expansion drive was meteoric in pace. In 1982 there were 19 transmitters, covering 26% of the population and reaching 17 million home viewers. By 1987 these figures were 197, 70% and 74 million respectively. The figures for a shorter period, between March 1984 and March 1985 are the clearest testament to the immense determination of Indira Gandhi, and her successor, to ‘televisé’ India. In these twelve months the number of transmitters leapt from 46 to 172 (Govt. of India 1994: 235). As Gupta notes: “in 1984, one new transmitter was commissioned everyday for four months” (1998: 32).

Several writers have identified political prestige for the ruling party as one major incentive behind the expansion of the national network (Mankekar 1993a; Pathania 1994; Pendakur 1991). In addition to the more pressing needs of the state outlined above, the rapid television expansion campaign, personally orchestrated, and officiated over by Indira, was a crucial weapon in electoral politics. As Ahluwalia (1984: 175) notes, she had planned to call elections by the end of 1984, and a propagation of dynastic mythology could be achieved through television. Endowing a nation with a ‘modernist’ technology, and one that increased her visibility, allowed her television expansion campaign to succeed on two fronts. The national network created a ‘theatre state’ in which she had the lead role.

By this time the Orwellian prophecy of government control and manipulation of information seemed very timely. The All India Sikh council protested against the propaganda of Doordarshan (hereafter DD) and All India Radio (AIR), fearing further alienation of their community (Gupta 1998: 44). In the southern states, long resistant to the linguistic and political hegemony of the north, the national network programmes were opposed. MG Ramachandran, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, urged viewers to switch off when they did not understand the language they heard on either state medium (Gupta 1998: 43)⁴. As Mitra has argued, DD was projecting a national image dominated by the Hindu practices of the Hindi speaking area of north India (1993a).

Television brought with it a complex set of cultural issues that the Indira regime seemed unable or unwilling to tackle. The implementation of the national network as a means of maintaining the integrity of the nation seemed a particularly blunt weapon in such a pluralistic environment. The 'Special Plan' had several ambiguities. It concentrated more on the highly publicised opening ceremonies than the development of regional or even 'national' programming. Some of the earliest programmes that people remember are *Star Trek*, *I Love Lucy*⁵, and perhaps fittingly, *Yes Minister*. A television mechanic, active in the city at the time, put this succinctly: "They had the network but no programmes". It also faced the challenge "of integrating various parts of the country [and] at the same time ensuring the prosperity of its cultural diversity through... programming" (Kishore 1994: 99).

A committee charged with seeking to forge "An Indian Personality for television" reported in 1984 that a result of the relay station expansion had been a "Delhi-centric view of India" where "the most trivial happening in Delhi becomes a national event, deserving of extensive television coverage while important events elsewhere hardly merit a mention" (Govt. of India 1985: 27). "As a result, while Delhi mostly sees itself, the rest of India sees mainly Delhi and occasionally glimpses

⁴ In 1994 there were riots in Bangalore during protests against the broadcast of Urdu on Doordarshan (cf. *Aaj* 8-11. x. 94).

⁵ Spigel notes that this was an important programme in 1950s America, one that helped early television families to develop their relationship with the new medium (1990: 85; 1992).

of the rest of India as seen by Delhi. Surely, this unidimensional view of India is not an inevitable result of space technology?" (Chitnis and Karnik, in *ibid.*: 27). Programme development came a clear second to the helicopter tour of India. Technological development and implementation were heavily circumscribed by political objectives.

Given the Delhi-centric output, and the clear policy of placing the relay centres, *kendras*, in border and tribal regions⁶, it was perhaps foreseeable that the national network would have trouble acting as a tool of legitimation for the Indian state, or that it might further weaken the centre's legitimacy. It also points up the resistance that those who were left out of the televisual expansions were likely to exert. Varanasi, well within the 'mainstream', was granted a transmitter after many other cities in Uttar Pradesh. This was something resented by many residents who, mindful of the place of Varanasi in Indian civilisation and culture, attributed this decision to the political nature of the Special plan:

Varanasi should have got this facility many years ago but those with 'reach' [undue sway] in Delhi ensured that places like Deoria, Sultanpur, Raibareli, Nainital, Allahabad, Bareilly, Agra and Gorakhpur were accorded greater priority than Varanasi (*Aaj* 26. viii. 84).

On the day of inauguration the *Aaj* editorial complained that the religious, literary and artistic heritage of the city had been ignored. Not only should the centre have been created earlier, it argued, but a full broadcasting and production centre established, not merely a relay transmitter (*Aaj* 26. viii. 84). Varanasi, the capital of the Bhojpuri cultural region and "city of Kabir, Tulsidas, Bhartendu, Ratnakar, Prasad, Premchand, as well as of Ravi Shankar, Ustad Bismillah Khan, Girja Devi, Kishan Maharaj...[a city with] not one or two but five universities" had been denied a chance to propagate the learning and tradition of which its residents see it as exemplar (*Aaj* 25. viii. 84).

Indira's plans were therefore compromised in several ways. National (i.e., Hindi/Hindu) programming was resisted in many areas of the country for it incensed

⁶ In 1984, Rs. 36.43 crore (364.3 million) were sanctioned for the North East in an attempt to reach 80% of the people in the region. (*Aaj* 26. viii. 84)

already vociferous critics of her regime. Further, those left out of her plan felt isolated from this purportedly integrationist application of technology and this was not just an issue of the 'India' project but also of development and modernity. The special supplement of *Aaj* urged readers not to dismiss television, "one of the greatest scientific achievements of the age" (ibid.), but prior to Indira's visit, Varanasi had been denied access, at least in a comprehensive or mass sense, to such an index of modernity. If a place within a developing nation and its modernist project were signified by inclusion on the televisual map of India, those left out were likely to sense rejection. At the same time, the 'National' thrust of the network chafed against the aspirations of the regions. That state television was widely perceived as representing the government as it wanted to be seen (Rajagopal 1993: 102) was a further bone of contention.

The first national event seen in Varanasi

Talking to people thirteen years later about the inauguration, it was striking that the Prime Minister's visit was not remembered so well as the fruits of her action: that the people of Varanasi could be part of the national mourning and witness to the violent convulsions that followed her assassination. And it is this irony, that a leader who foresaw the broadcast of national spectacles, and became the immediate subject of one, that propelled Varanasi into the world of television. For barely two months after her visit to their city people were crowded around every available television set watching DD coverage of the last rites of their leader.

I remember the women sitting right here in front of the set. With joined hands they said "Hai Mata, Hai Mata, you came to inaugurate our television [centre] and today we are looking at you, your body, you who knew everything, you knew, no?"

She knew, she knew that when she died the people would watch, 'how many people will watch me'?

So remarked a woman recounting the scenes of grief in front of her television set, on 3rd November 1984 as the funeral was broadcast live. In houses around Varanasi people were gathered around every available set to Doordarshan coverage of the entire ceremony. Elsewhere in the city, in a big house off a small alley, a local

member of the Congress (I) who was 'personally' close to Indira Gandhi laid open his television to the neighbourhood, as his wife later narrated:

They came crying through the alleys avoiding the curfew, they kept on coming. The television was placed for all to see but the crowds grew too big and the television was raised higher. Women sat at the front, crying and beating their chests. There was a curfew but the police let people move to watch television, they knew they couldn't stop people watching, they even gave people encouragement (*prerana*) and assistance. How could they stop people? Two or three thousand people came and my husband said to *all* "come, watch".

Thirteen years later, many shopkeepers reported that the real surge in television sales came not during the run up to the inauguration but in the days following the assassination. This event indelibly etched the coming of television to their city to a specific, and violent period of post independence history. During the early days of November 1984 television provided a window on to a troubled world, for after Indira Gandhi's assassination pogroms had begun against the Sikh community in cities across north India. The distant *darshan* of the nation, and its ceremonies and personalities, that Indira had planned to offer Indian citizens through the network was, for the residents of Varanasi, a rather catastrophic first *darshan*. The vainglorious Indira was centre-stage in the first event that Varanasi saw of their televised theatre state.

The expanded Doordarshan (lit. distant vision) network facilitated the propagation of a dynastic mythology in which visibility was crucial. The network established a framework through which, from any part of India, however distant from Delhi, the ceremonies and figureheads of state would be rendered visible. The personal shyness that Indira had shown for the mass media when Minister for Information and Broadcasting (Masani 1975: 156) seems to have dissipated when she became Prime Minister. Her use of the state media for personal and party propaganda had developed alongside her distrust for the media freedoms of others. National radio was proverbially known as All Indira Radio and DD might have been the same had her own death not forestalled this.

The expansion and commercialisation of television

In the years since 1984 television ownership has soared. I had expected to find that shared viewing of limited sets would be the norm but was surprised to discover that multiple sets were common in many households, and not just those of the very wealthy. Increased ownership has resulted in significant changes in viewing practice. The mass viewing so evident in the narratives of November 1984, has given way to one more obviously orientated around a household and its members. The organisation of Doordarshan programming has changed and so too its *raison d'être*. Where state-induced development and progress had been the rationale for television expansion, the logic of global capitalism and consumerism now lead Indian television and its viewers into the 21st century. Since 1991, satellite television has been introduced by foreign and Indian media companies. The result is that in Varanasi, over the space of thirteen years, a single national channel has been replaced, for those with a satellite connection, by an average of thirty two. The following figures indicate some of the important developments to television as a medium and to the expansion of the DD network.

	1982	1987	1997
Transmitters	19	197	868
Pop. covered	26%	70%	87%
Home viewers ⁷	17 million	74	296
Revenue	159 (Rs. million)	1363	57276

Doordarshan estimated that in 1997, in addition to the home viewers, a further 152 million have access to television in other places and that there were 57.7 million television homes in the country, with an estimated total audience of 448 million. Rural viewers, in 1996, accounted for 49% of all viewers. Television has become a mass medium. These figures only hint at some of the other changes that have

⁷ Home viewers are those who have access to television at home. Total population in all these figures is recorded as 930 million (Govt. of India 1997: 43-4).

occurred: increases in revenue indicate growing commercialism, whilst the increase in transmitters denotes the expansion of the network, on a national, regional and local basis.

It is therefore necessary to trace some of the developments in Indian television between the 'Special Plan' and the emergence of a multi-channel environment and to examine the nature of the growth. In so doing an account of television will be framed by an assessment of its political-economy because television should be seen in terms of the political, social and economic fields in which it has developed (Williams 1974). There are two clear aspects that will be highlighted. One is the progression of Doordarshan towards commercial television, privately-produced programmes and an entertainment-orientated service. The second is the place of the 'nation' in a television environment in which DD services are increasingly regional or local, and at the same time reach overseas.

The inception of the 'Special Plan' had been marked by two key concerns. In pursuance of the dual and interconnected projects of nation and modernity television was given a crucial role in the development and 'narration' of a post-colonial nation (cf. Mankekar 1993a; Mitra 1993a and b). In the early years, television was a symbol that India was progressing on a modernist trajectory and was used for educational and development purposes. It was a didactic medium and at the same time a symbol of modernity. Perhaps in this sense there was a fundamental ambiguity. The supreme status symbol in the drawing rooms of Delhi in the 1970s was a medium that transmitted programmes such as *Krishi Darshan*, bringing farmers up to date with the latest agricultural techniques. This tension was unlikely to secure the longevity of the television experiment in India and what is clear over the last three decades is the resolution of this ambiguity. Doordarshan now represents something almost opposite in nature: having sidelined the developmental concerns of the majority, it is now entertainment based and commercially driven. This important shift is intimately related to concurrent social and economic change within India over the period, exemplified by the increased size and influence of the urban middle class.

The impetus the medium gained during the later years of Indira's rule was built on by her son Rajiv, who personified the technological aspirations of 1980s India. He continued the expansion of the network and encouraged the production and consumption of colour television sets under a faintly *swadeshi* model in which foreign assistance was sought but kept to an absolute minimum. Government undertakings and financial commitment meant that in 1983 50,000 sets were produced, whilst this had risen to 800,000 by 1986 (Kishore 1994: 98). During 1988, sets were being sold at the rate of five per minute (Singal and Roger 1989: 67). Television production and ownership was clearly growing but what was happening to the programmes and what did the viewers think?

Gupta (1998: 33) notes that in the early 1980s educational programmes were unpopular, particularly in comparison to films and *filmi*⁸ programmes such as *Chitrahaar*. Doordarshan was faced with a dilemma. With an avowed intention to educate and inform it could not do so if no one was watching, and sponsors were reluctant to back educational programmes (Rajagopal 1993: 104). It was in this context that programmes such as *Ham Log* were commissioned.

The first serial of mass popularity, *Ham Log*, *We people*, (1984) set the agenda for DD programming thereafter. A carefully crafted drama, based on the Mexican tele-novella and incorporating the recommendations of an anthropologist, this serial is still held up as an exemplar of what television should be. People point to its elaboration of the real concerns of real people: a struggling lower middle class household. It began, following the Mexican blueprint, with a strongly didactic approach. A 'message' was delivered by a film star (Ashok Kumar) at the end of each episode and through this interpretative closure a developmental objective incorporated. Significantly, popularity was low until this was diluted (cf. Das 1995). With *Ham Log* came Maggi noodles, now a favourite food of children but then a suspect Chinese dish (Singal and Rogers 1989: 77), and the era of commercial television began. A product was born and a formula established: television could

⁸ The adjective *filmi* refers to *any* aspect of the world of popular films - hairstyles, gossip about the stars, programmes that touch on aspects of the industry, or spin-offs of any description.

attract viewers and make money but the developmental objectives had to be sidelined first. With revenue increasingly a concern, commercial television became the norm. Henceforth the production and supply of television programming would be within a market structure.

However the revenue potential of DD was not fully apparent until the broadcast of two mythologicals, the *Ramayana* (directed by R. Sagar) and the *Mahabharata*. Sagar's *Ramayana* had audience ratings of almost total penetration. Lutgendorf reports that the serial, which ran between January 1987 and July 1988, was generating an eighth of DD's total income whilst perhaps attracting a similar proportion of the Indian population (1993: 223). The success of this show is by now legendary and it has been controversially linked to the rise of the Hindu right. Several writers have noted the tendency of DD in the later years of the 1980s to co-opt audiences simultaneously as viewers of a Hindu construction of India and as consumers within a liberalising economy (Ludden 1996; Mankekar 1993a & b; Pathania 1994; Pendakur 1991).

In newspapers, amongst policy makers and elsewhere the question had long been asked if India could afford television, even when the programming was educational and development orientated. The early speeches of Indira Gandhi indicate that she clearly saw the need to justify government expenditure on television expansion (cf. Govt. of India 1985). As one later writer asked, when responding to the advent of morning programming: "Should there be breakfast television when most children in India do not get breakfast?" (Dua 1987). The rise of commercial television on the 'public service' DD put this issue centre stage. As shows portraying the lives of the rich in metropolitan cities began to predominate, on a national network which was funded by adverts promoting consumer desire and aspiration, it seemed as if television was serving an increasingly limited constituency. Pendakur sees India's experience of television, speaking of DD, as one that has produced:

a television policy that simultaneously serves its own propaganda needs as well as the demands of the indigenous and transnational capitalists, along with entertainment prerogatives of the middle/upper-middle class, while the communication and other needs of the majority of Indians are pushed aside (1991: 259).

DD therefore came in for criticism before satellite services began in the early 1990s. Although some serials were still being produced along the social-education-developmental axes (e.g., *Buniyad*, about family lives during partition) they were increasingly framed by an advertising narrative of desire. The “tidiness of the middle class’ own image” (Varma 1998: 123) began to predominate as the original aims of the network were increasingly marginalised. The verisimilitude of the early serials, depicting the trials and tribulations of lower middle class life, with which viewers had so willingly identified (cf. Das 1995), were replaced with programmes which clearly encouraged aspiration.

A movement had begun away from programmes peopled by characters “with lives like ours” (implicit in the title of *Ham Log*), to those inhabiting other social constellations. So decisive has this shift been that the DD axiom of old, “education, information and entertainment”, has effectively been reversed. As Das points out, when *Ham Log* was re-run during 1992-3 it spectacularly failed to draw a sizeable or responsive audience (1995: 183). Something had evidently changed, on and off television.

Satellite footprints reach India

It wasn’t something that happened gradually. It happened overnight. Blondes, wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d’état - they all arrived on the same train. They unpacked together. They stayed at the same hotel...[N]ow whole wars, famines, picturesque massacres and Bill Clinton could be summoned up like servants.
(Roy 1997: 27)

The technical term for the area on the earth’s surface to which a satellite, or one of its transponders, can broadcast is a footprint. It seems a particularly appropriate term, evoking images of an overbearing giant stalking the planet and trampling underfoot all in its way. The footprint of one satellite (Asiasat 1) extends “from Japan in the East to Egypt in the west, and from Russian Siberia in the north to Indonesia in the south. Embracing more than 38 countries and 2.7 billion people, 52% of the world’s population” (Sneddon 1992: 5.1).

There were no helicopter tours of India to announce the arrival of this televisual development, nothing to announce that satellite footprints were leaving their mark on the neighbourhood below. And, as yet, there is no received history of the events which have led to the multi-channel environment in India. Two things can be stated with certainty: penetration by global media conglomerates began in earnest with the economic reforms of 1991. Secondly, Star Television was in the vanguard, although CNN had been broadcasting into India since 1989 (Sidhva 1995). What followed was a scramble for places on satellites, as media moguls saw the 'market potential' of the Indian middle class, that proverbial nation within a nation. Meanwhile, DD officials were nonchalantly asserting that none but the *élite* would watch the services since they would be prohibitively expensive.

However, within months, there were reports that 6,000 low budget cable operators were established in Bombay, with a further 20 starting businesses daily (Piramal 1992); by January 1994 there were an estimated 100,000 operators throughout India (Bhatt 1994: 57)⁹. They were providing a cheap and local form of access to satellite channels. As we shall see, the form of local provision was to have several important implications for subsequent developments. The cheap and often quite informal services provided households with an easy way into new services. They ensured that it was not only the metropolitan *élite* who would constitute the audience.

The image of the dispassionate footprint crushing all in its path is one that remains potent in India. In India, and the scholarly community, most accounts of the growth of satellite television have focused on the global nature of the channels provided and analysed this in terms of a global-local dichotomy. This is, for obvious reasons, to be expected. However, what it does tend to mask is the fact that whilst satellite technology has enabled television to become a truly global affair it has also allowed more regional and local services to develop. The following channels were available in Varanasi during the period of my fieldwork:

⁹ This would appear to be a gross overestimate unless the numbers have plummeted dramatically since the arrival of companies such as Siti Cable. A news report on Zee TV (29. xi. 98) suggested there were 40,000 cable operators nationwide.

- *Doordarshan*

(DD) 1 [*the national channel*]

DD2 [Metro, national but delivered by satellite]

DD4 [Malayalam]

DD5 [Tamil]

DD6 [Oriya]

DD7 [Bengali]

DD Movie club

- *Music and youth lifestyle*

V TV

MTV

- *Private regional channels*

Gemini [Tamil]

Vijay TV [Tamil]

Sun [Tamil]

Sun [Malayalam]

- *Miscellaneous*

Siti Channel or CTV [Creative TV]

Star Movies

Star Plus

Tvi

TNT/Cartoon network.

Pakistan TV [1&2]

- *All round 'family channels'.*

Zee TV [later renamed Zee India]

Home TV

EL TV

Zee cinema [Pay channel]

Sony

ATN [Asia Television Network]

- *Sports*

ESPN [Pay channel]

Star Sport [Pay channel]

- *News and information*

Discovery [Pay channel]

ABNI [Asia Business news India]

National Geographic [pay channel]

CNN

BBC

- *Religious*

NEPC

Maharishi Veda Vision

Channel surfers in Varanasi are likely to see popular Hindi films, *filmi* chart shows, 'lifestyle' and magazine type current affairs, business news, American soap operas (dubbed or otherwise), classic British comedy, Hindi sitcoms and Hollywood blockbusters. Political reporting, much more exhaustive than that offered by the

national DD network, is complemented by foreign news programmes offering views of India that lie beyond the control of the state. At the same time, viewers will see local figures, friends and vistas on the programmes of CTV and Siti Cable, the local Varanasi channels. Or, if a view from the other side of the border is sought, Pakistan TV can provide this.

What is clear here is that a range of channels articulating very different notions of nation and region are to be found. Take Doordarshan, which now conceives of its service in terms of a three tier division between *national*, *regional* and *local* services for which it offers the following definitions:

National: programmes of common interest for the entire country.

Regional: Programmes of interest to the people speaking a particular language or with a distinct regional identity.

Local: programmes for a single ethno-linguistic zone (Govt. of India 1997: 24).

In Uttar Pradesh, the DD service comes from Lucknow, with occasional feeds of national programmes from Delhi. Two local centres (*kendras*) in Gorakhpur and Bareilly produce and broadcast limited amounts of more specific programming to their surrounding areas. A network of 90 transmitters covers the entire state from Uttarkashi in the Himalaya to Jhansi in the Bundelkand region. Furthermore, because the ten 'Regional Language Satellite Services' (RLSS) are now broadcast via satellite they can be received outside of their state of origin. In Varanasi, whose population includes large regional-linguistic communities, the availability of the RLSS' DD7 (Bangla), DD4 (Malayalam), DD5 (Tamil) and DD11 (Gujarati) is of no small importance.

At the time of my fieldwork, press reports emerged suggesting that DD was establishing a local *kendra* in Varanasi, similar to those in Gorakhpur and Bareilly. By late 1998 this construction work had been completed and staff were being recruited and it appeared that the demands of the city for their own DD television station were, at last, being met. The reach of DD is therefore also becoming more localised. However, at the same time with satellites broadcasting its programmes to

the Indian diaspora (notably in the Gulf) its reach is extending beyond its territorial boundaries. The picture of Doordarshan is therefore one of a more distant and more intimate *darshan*: a single rather unwieldy national channel has been supplemented by regional and local services, and by ex-territorial presence.

A movement between globalism and regionalism is displayed by some of the global conglomerates broadcasting in the region. The list of available satellite channels contains truly global channels such as Discovery, BBC World and TNT/Cartoon amongst others. However, what such a list of channels cannot illustrate is the extent to which these, and other channels have begun to Indianise. The result of this process is that the brash 'Pepsi youth culture' of MTV is supplemented by the more 'Indian' VTV, the international sports channel ESPN ensures that it provides all the Indian cricket it can muster, *The Bold and the Beautiful* is dubbed into Hindi, and other overtly American serials dropped altogether.

From October 1996, Star television ran an advert in which an English speaking man is tied to a chair. He is surrounded by Indian teachers in mortarboards, brandishing canes as they teach their pupil Hindi. He stammers and stutters, but finally gets the message across, announcing in 'Hinglish' that Star Plus will be running shows in Hindi. There is some uncertainty in the tone of the Englishman, giving viewers the sense that he is doing this only to please them not of his own volition.

This advertisement is, as might be expected of the Murdoch channel, a rather canny and elegant piece of marketing. It admits to the Indian audience that Star cannot brazen its way into the country with its standard package of American soaps "where brittle blondes with lipstick and hairstyles rigid with spray seduce androids and defend their sexual empires" (Roy 1997: 27). It acknowledges that to be acceptable Star must meet the demands of India and quietly concedes that, prior to this, its programming was more middle America than middle India and often regarded as offensive. This publicity campaign signalled a '*deshi* drive' in which English was substituted by Hindi and scheduling recast to suit a less cosmopolitan constituency of

viewers. This included poaching eight hit shows from DD1 for the prime time 7-9pm slot¹⁰.

This change in direction by Star and others should be seen in light of two contexts. Popularity and sound viewing figures mean successful (i.e., profitable) television and financial imperatives rather than cultural sensitivities were at work, whatever the marketing implied. Considerable opposition to what was seen as an invasion of foreign cultural values had forced a realignment of programming. Secondly, Indian government moves to recast the regulatory environment have been precipitated by what has been seen as the 'satellite invasion of India' (the title of Bhatt's 1994 book). The new broadcasting act *Prasar Bharati*¹¹, (lit. 'spread Indianness'), which had languished in parliament for over twenty years dealt with issues such as media ownership, and autonomy for DD and All India Radio (AIR). Its enactment was a legislative expression of general concern about foreign media activity in India; concern that finds clearest expression in domestic settings.

Such changes signal a trend in evidence throughout the television scene in India: that is the growing regionalisation of services. These shifts in emphasis, followed by both DD and global satellite channels might be viewed in terms of *broadcasting* and *narrowcasting*. The Doordarshan of the 'Special Plan' years was definitively a model of *broadcasting*, where the focus was an entire nation, but it has now become more regional and local in nature. No longer is the entire country fed the same national channel but each region, in what might be termed *narrowcasting*, receives linguistically and culturally attuned programming. In some sense it might even be said that the regional aspect has come to have precedence over the national. Private

¹⁰This indigenisation drive was the first policy brief for former Director General of Doordarshan, R. Basu, when he became managing director of Star. Programmes moved from DD included *Chandrakantar*, *Imtihaan*, *Meri Awaz Suno*, *Tu Tu Main Main* (cf. *India Today*, August 31st 1996).

¹¹The *Prasar Bharati* Act reframed existing communications legislation (previously that of the 1885 Telegraph Act) in light of the new media environment and instituted DD and AIR in positions legally akin to the BBC. The intention was to clarify national media policy on supra-national media, allowing DD and AIR to operate without government interference and to make Indian media more Indian. There is insufficient space to discuss the progress of the *Prasar Bharati* through the political and legislative machinery of India since the act was first tabled in 1977 by LK Advani (BJP supremo) in reaction to media manipulation by Indira Gandhi. A useful (if outdated) account of the issues can be found in Thomas (1990).

local channels, such as Siti Cable and CTV in Varanasi, offer the most literal example of *narrowcasting* by offering “city specific programmes...coverage that’s not international, national or regional but intimately local”.

Global satellite channels, using a different definition of regional (which for them equates with country specific), are becoming more ‘national’ in orientation. They are now providing services for individual countries on the basis of the ‘nation-state one culture’ equation, something which DD has clearly moved away from in its recent history. Global media concerns might like to feel that what they provide is *narrowcasting*, public reaction suggests that it is seen otherwise: namely as an all-encompassing and rather insensitively conceived *broadcast* footprint, hardly attuned to local cultural difference on the ground.

Clearly what can be termed *broadcasting* or *narrowcasting* is a question of scale or perspective. What it is important to recognise is that the technology that allows for global television services also allows for more narrowly conceived services to develop. The result in India is a complex media environment that is at the same time global, national, regional and local in nature.

Television: a vision of which society?

Whatever impression this may give about satellite channels, and their cultural sensibilities, there is still considerable debate at national and domestic levels about ‘scurrilous’ television and its malign influence. Moreover, it is not just the exogenous, but Indianising, Star and V TV that come in for criticism. Even the massively popular Zee TV and DD are harangued by some people some of the time. The sense that television is more entertaining than ever coexists with the feeling that it is marginal to the needs of the majority and has the power to corrupt all.

A critic, writing in 1997, lists some of the shows that DD commissioned, (some of which have now moved to satellite channels), which for him represented unwelcome additions to the Indian television repertoire:

If we reflect on the programmes and serials telecast over the last few years, it becomes quite clear that themes are mostly extra-marital relations, immoral love, cheap and spicy humour, an excess of vengeance and criminal conspiracies...some of the best examples are *Svabhiman*, *Shanti*, *Junoon*, *Kanoon*, *Chandrakanta* [on DD or previously on DD]...if the new wonders of Zee TV like *Dastaan*, *Tara*, *Hasratein* and *Sailab* are added then a unique storm of sex and immoral culture comes before us...in real life are husbands and lovers really changed like clothes? (Sharma 1997)

This article illustrates some of the critical reaction towards changes in television since the advent of satellite channels. However, what it necessarily obscures, given its polemic orientation, is that these programmes are very popular. Television is not only a medium whose 'value' is debated but also one that symbolises concurrent social and economic changes. Within this terrain of debate there are those who view television as an ultimate tool for the 'uplift' of the lower orders, and believe that television should be only for education and that contemporary programming is corrupting the minds of the nation. There are others who rarely watch DD (indeed who have no aerial with which to receive it) and watch only satellite channels and consider those that criticise these as narrow-minded or backward. There are many, unsurprisingly given television's highly varied evaluation, whose criticisms and viewing practices suggest a fundamental ambiguity between public protestations and private preferences (cf. Brunson 1991).

My pre-fieldwork expectation was that satellite television might be the reserve of the rich, and, in this sense, a class rather than a mass phenomenon. What I found was that, although financial resources played a part in decisions about taking a connection, since Rs.100¹² per month is not a negligible sum of money, other issues were involved. There were countless families, identified in survey work around different areas of Varanasi, who clearly had the means to pay for a subscription but had resisted, dismissing it as an unwanted intrusion into family life. Children and their studies were often cited as a reason for not taking a connection, because the young were seen as highly prone to corruption by excessive viewing or exposure to the wrong programmes. Many household elders dismissed satellite television as either peripheral to their daily concerns or as antithetical to their household

¹² At the time of my fieldwork this was worth nearly c. £1.40.

standards. Such views usually contained references to excessive bodily display (usually of the female body) and of the western proclivity for immoderate sexual activity.

Others agreed that much on contemporary television gave cause for concern but that much was very valuable; careful control over viewing was necessary. In this respect the joint-family emerged as a cultural filter capable of protecting Indian ways of life through its ideological and practical organisation of household life. This thesis is directly concerned with these views and how they translate within the household arena. It considers the actual practices of household viewing within the framework of wider narratives about cultural values and change, the joint family and 'Indianness'. It seeks to understand how households have sought an accommodation with, or domesticated satellite television, according to ideas and actualities of joint family existence.

This said, people watch television, (and the programmes they express disdain for), and it has largely been accommodated into their lives. So, although 'official' statements are important, because they indicate around what values opposition or appreciation is mobilised, it is important to consider the practicalities of viewing. Or, put another way, it is necessary to consider everyday viewing by families who want to watch satellite television *and* who admit that the issues it throws up are of real practical and moral importance. The fact that an arrest warrant was served against Rupert Murdoch in July 1995, for what was construed by parliamentarians as 'cultural terrorism' should serve as a reminder that there are strong feelings about satellite television and its associated cultures. The satellite footprint is rarely seen as an object of delicacy.

CHAPTER TWO

Television and anthropology: towards a clearer picture

For most people there are only two places in the world - where they live and their television set.
Don DeLillo

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline some of the many approaches that can be employed in the study of television and to argue for a context based analysis of the act of viewing.

Television is a leading object in the contemporary world - an object, institution and practice interpellated by financial, global and national factors. Television sets are commonplace domestic objects in settings as disparate as the locations that they themselves display. Television programmes create common links between people, providing topics of conversation, shared experience, and frames of reference. Television networks, national or pan-regional, create massive communities of viewers, imagined communities across disparate social, geographic and political settings. Occasionally, they bring the televised world together, for a sporting event, a wedding or a funeral. A child in front of the television set travels the world before she is allowed out of the house (Meyrowitz 1985: 238). Televisions are purveyors of images, household termini through which viewers embark and information disembarks. Televisions act as a link between people in a city, or region or country; they join a household to the wider world wherever that may be. Televisions deliver commercial messages direct to the home, creating consumers of viewers with their images of desire. Programmes create needs, show other lives, styles and ways of being. Some view television as a glorified shopping mall, others a tool for education, a baby-sitter or time waster. For others, television acts as a point of contact to a distant world, a friend, someone to talk to in moments of boredom or solitude. Those more politically focused might see television as a handmaiden of imperialist, capitalist forces - a peddler of political and commercial ideology. Consequently

some countries seek to limit what their citizens can watch fearing a deluge of distracting and harmful foreign influence.

In the house, as someone in Varanasi once said, television is like another member of the family: an unnoticed addition to the household furniture, a reassuring glow in the corner and a technology inculcated into the web of family relations. Its farrago of images can be ignored, resisted, abhorred or adored. It can be a friendly, interactive clock, marking mornings from evenings, Mondays from Tuesdays, inscribing corporate and national life on the household routine. Televisions can reiterate the solidarity of the house, when all sit down to watch a favourite programme together. They create fights, when people refuse to accede to others' demands. Televisions are objects around which rooms are planned, meals cooked, routines organised. Television is a symbol of existence, a signal that people are in the house, and that the house is in the world.

Given the range of meanings that television can hold, the links it can make and the diverse ways in which it is received or employed in different cultural settings this type of introduction seems a legitimate way to begin, an act of self-defence and a signal of intention. The defence: that the television set, its programmes and viewers are implicated in an infinite realm of contexts that cannot be evoked in any other way. The intent: to try, within this chapter, and beyond, to conjure up a framework which will allow for a discussion of some of these contexts. One writer has noted that radios, in their early existence in Britain, were often viewed as an 'unruly guest' (Moore 1988: 23). Television is my unruly, but invited guest, and this section will outline the way in which I seek to tame and explain it.

The introduction was suggestive of the ways in which television is, at one and the same time, object and medium, that the practice of viewing can take a range of forms, and that numerous institutions and ideologies are involved in the production, dissemination and regulation of television programming. Any analytical frame must therefore try to simultaneously capture these various attributes.

From all the conceptual and theoretical perspectives available, my research experience and practice has inevitably guided my employment of heuristic tools. Principally, I sought to concentrate on the settings in which television viewing took place. This study is therefore one more concerned with televisual contexts than televisual texts and develops from the conviction that an ethnographic study of television should be concerned with the nature and meanings of the activity, rather than with the meanings of texts as understood outside of this activity. It will be argued that television watching is a socially constituted practice moulded by the contexts in which it occurs. By framing an account of television viewing in this way it is possible to highlight the cross-cultural variability (cf. Lull 1988), and the historically specific nature of such practice.

In short, I sketch out an “analysis of the specific relationships of particular audiences to particular types of media content which are located within the broader framework of an analysis of media consumption and domestic ritual” (Morley 1992: 276-7). Attention to television content is made in terms of the context of viewing. The programmes are important, but I argue that the nature of viewing and reception by the north Indian joint family household is predicated on this particular organisational form. The household is imagined in terms of the gendered, generational and kinship patterns which define its members’ relations to each other, to the internal spaces of the house and the outside, and the temporality of daily life.

This chapter is organised in the following way. It begins by considering literature on technology with the objective of framing technology, broadly speaking, within its social context. The aim is to draw attention to the ways in which technology is impacted by society. We often assume that “technology has developed a power so completely of its own making that it overrides human participation” (Gutman 1982: 2). This section seeks to show how social engagement with technology is crucial in determining its form, function and implications in any given cultural context. The development of television as a national institution and a household practice illustrates the impact of society on technology.

Attention is then turned to communication technologies, and television in particular. It is argued that, on the whole, media have been analysed in terms of their content. Insights from medium theorists, as opposed to content analysts, can encourage a focus on media as environments rather than in terms of their content. A consideration of the development of television studies takes issue with the content based focus of such research and, by discussing recent movements towards contextual accounts of media use as a practice, marks out space for an anthropology of television.

The question of technology: the case of television

Answering the question of effects on society of a particular technology requires one to have a good theory of how that society works. The simplicity of the question is misleading. Answering it properly will often require an understanding of the *overall* dynamics of a society, and it is thus one of the most difficult, rather than one of the easiest, questions to answer. (Mackenzie and Wajcman 1985: 6-7, original emphasis).

The narrative of Western historiography is, to a large degree, that of technological innovation. The 'Ages of Man' are those of progressive technical development, moving humans from the Stone age, to the Iron, Steam and Information Ages (Pfaffenberger 1992: 494). Technology is, in this estimation, the driving force of history and divorced from its actual applications and uses. In Williams' view this amounts to an ideology, a "way of interpreting general change through a displaced and abstracted cause" (1974: 119).

Technological determinism holds that, "technology impinges on society from outside of society" (Mackenzie and Wajcman 1985: 4). It is a view which obscures the social, political and economic factors which lie behind the invention and uses of technology. Technology appears to have its own logic, internal to itself and external to its creators. In this view, we are governed by technology, it is a *deus ex machina*, a Frankenstein's monster that controls its creators. Rather than see the use of technology as a cause of change, technology itself becomes the prime causal factor.

Such a view of the world, and the instruments of change that drive it, have to some extent been internalised and permeate both popular and academic accounts of technology and/or social change. However, recent attempts to write against the grain of such technological determinism have argued that we should consider two aspects of technology and its effects (Lemonnier 1992; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1985; Pfaffenberger 1992). In the first instance, attention should be directed to the ways in which social forces lie behind technological innovation, and in the second, consideration should be paid to the manner in which social forces affect the ways in which a technology is used. On both counts we should consider the “social shaping of technology” (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1985).

Technology can be understood in a broad sense, to include the human body, ploughs, writing, trains and televisions. The first of these examples, the body, appears most out of place. However, as Marcel Mauss argued, the body is the “first and most natural technical object” (1973: 75) and the one that is most clearly inscribed upon by those that create, decorate, refine and legislate over it. His observations have created room for various thinkers to consider the body as a prime site of culture (Bourdieu 1977), and the forces that seek to control it (Foucault 1977). It is a recognition of the social and cultural impact on this technical object that is at the heart of recent attempts to think less about what technology does to humans and more about what we do to technology. If we accept that the body is a technology, and that society, politics and economy shape it, then the acknowledgement that other technologies are impacted by a reason that is as ‘cultural’ as it is ‘practical’ will not be demanding.

Writers such as Lemonnier (1992) and Latour (1993) have written about the process of technological creation or invention. Innovations are represented by media and professional discourses as applications of science, of reason overcoming human needs. However, their work highlights how other more arbitrary forces, cultural and social, and more urbane interests are at work in the creation of technology, be it household or other. Detailing the production of ‘highly technical’ products such as jumbo jets, Lemonnier (1992: 19) argues that “the technical options of engineers...are clearly influenced by representations, beliefs, and ideas which have little to do with

basic scientific, technological or even economic logic". Need and function assume a secondary importance in the process of technological innovation and creation. The social forces at play in the creation of technology are obscured by discourses that hide the humdrum aspects of technological innovation and instead present technological innovation as the application of pure science to human need.

The case of television offers an example of the social and political forces which lie behind technological creation and application. As Raymond Williams notes, "radio and television...were developed for transmission to individual homes, though there was nothing in the technology to make this inevitable" and that "unlike all previous communication technology, radio and television were systems primarily devised for transmission and reception as abstract processes, with little or no definition of preceding content" (1974: 23-5). His argument here is twofold: he shows that radio and television were not devised to fulfil any 'need' or master function, this was sought for them once the technology had been developed. Secondly, radio and television (in Britain) were seized upon at a specific historical juncture for the purposes of propagating social welfare values in a Reithian public service model.

The previous chapter detailed some of the political motives underlying the expansion of the National network in India. We can recall the words of committee members who asked whether the Delhi-centric focus of television programming was the "inevitable result" of the technology being employed. The development of a 'National network' was circumscribed by political and 'national' agendas which overrode consideration as to the actual content, beyond that which accorded with Indira Gandhi's needs. Similarly, the political economy of television in the late 1980s and 1990s has driven the organisation of services and programme production. These factors are not technological but speak of the political and economic environment within which the institution of television has developed both inside and outside India.

While MacKenzie and Wajcman demonstrate the social shaping of technology in various domains they are weakest in discussing how 'use' is itself an important factor. This represents a lacuna since they are quick to point out that technology refers to

human activities as well as objects (1985: 3). It is the uses to which technology is put which most clearly articulate the social shaping of it, in particular historical and cultural settings.

The processes through which television became a domestic medium of entertainment, how its uses were learnt, is best outlined by Spigel discussing America in the 1950s (1990; 1992). Her work describes how post-war families learnt to live with television as a household object and medium. She describes some of the suspicions that families harboured and some of the resources through which they were encouraged to incorporate television into home and life. Advertisements and features in women's magazines created discursive rules for thinking about television and 'serving suggestions' for its use. Images of domestic space in such advertisements were important because they allowed people to see how television might fit into their own home.

The introduction of television into family life was not without hesitations on the part of parents. There were concerns about where the television should be put, who would watch what, with whom and when. The television had to be represented as an object that would sit comfortably within the social fabric of post-war American family life. An interaction between pre-existing social forms and a new technology is at the centre of this process of accommodation. At times the television models produced reflected this: a set with dual screens was advertised, sending the message that television did not have to be a divisive household object and could instead lead to a more cohesive, though differentially satisfied, family. An oven with built-in television screen reflected the gendered divisions of household labour and offered women the ability to cook and watch. Technological innovation intimately reflects the cultural and social settings to which is addressed.

What it is necessary to appreciate for any technology is that a dialectic is at work between society and that technology. Political and economic factors are often important in determining what form a technology takes (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1985). And the subsequent use and development of the technology is intimately

effected by social forces. Society and technology interact in what might be termed a socio-technological system.

This is not to argue that technology does not shape society, but rather that it is important to consider the manner in which its creation and uses are themselves shaped by society. These two points must be raised prior to the question of effect. Once it is accepted that society shapes technology and that the uses of technology are also shaped by society, the proposition that technology χ causes an effect of type χ^1 must be reconsidered within the frame of a much wider range of factors. For, as Williams argues in respect of communication technologies, “if [they are] the cause, all other causes, all that men ordinarily see as history, are at once reduced to effects” (1974: 127).

Therefore effects cannot be seen as preordained by the type of technology which is adopted. As Schaniel argues:

the process of adopting and adapting introduced technology...does not imply that introduced technology does not lead to change, but the change is not preordained by the technology adapted...the process of technological adaptation is one where the introduced technology is adopted to the social processes of the adopting society, and not vice versa (cited in Pfaffenberger 1992: 511).

Although the use of television might appear to be uniform and preordained by its technological characteristics, a cross-cultural account of television can show that this is far from the case. This is not to discount the possibility that the American ‘couch potato’ might equate with the Indian ‘couch pakora’ (apologies to Lutgendorf 1995) but to contend that the remainder of this thesis will demonstrate that the social and cultural settings into which television arrived and has developed in Varanasi are inseparable from its subsequent use and potential impacts.

To anticipate my arguments we shall see that the nature of, and ideas about, the joint family, relations patterned by conjugality and affinity, gender and generation are all implicated in the uses and reception of television within the households of Varanasi. Historically and culturally specific ideas about domesticity and public space are also implicated in the ways in which television has been appropriated by the families I

encountered. The idiom of *darshan*, seeing, and the hierarchies between people that this presumes, inflect patterns of access to the television and particular genres of programming. In the context of increased foreign programming, the idiom of *sharm*, shame, plays an important role in the organisation of family viewing.

To sum up, the one-way traffic typical of technological determinism (technology determines the shape of society and has the same effects in all social settings) can be replaced by an appreciation of the flows between the technology and society. Rather than see the technology as the cause of all change, we can consider questions about the uses and varieties of technology in any social setting, and then begin to think about the question of its effects.

Information or communication technologies: Content or medium?

Effective study of the media deals not only with content of media but with the media themselves and the total cultural environment within which the media function (McLuhan 1995[1969]: 236).

The question of technology and its effects is most often posed in discussions about communications technology. Following the 'Ages of Man' typology, this is the Information Age in which communications technologies are responsible for the generation, storage, and dissemination of information, in greater quantities and at higher velocity than in any previous historical epoch.

The questions asked about television (by scholars and audiences) have largely avoided the medium itself especially when the objective has been to delineate the effects. Instead, the focus has traditionally been on the content that the medium carries with the assumption that a medium is a "neutral delivery system" (Meyrowitz 1985: 15). The tendency has been therefore to see the effects as a function of the text, message or content, rather than the effect (following the section above) as a product of an interaction between social and technological forms. This is particularly the case with television where the question of effects on children is posed in terms of content (e.g., on-screen violence leads to violent children). However this

is only half the story, as Medrich notes: "The effects of television content are often thought to be the principal problem, but television's role as constant background to daily life may culturally prove to have greater significance" (cited in Morley 1992: 166).

Medium analysts argue that it is the media environment, not the media content, which affects social life. This proposition was most forcefully (and cryptically) argued by McLuhan who suggested that "the medium is the message' because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and forms of human associations" (1994 [1964]: 9). Whether talking about televisions, printed books or hieroglyphic tablets, McLuhan was concerned by the media apart from their content.

In this respect McLuhan's work occupied similar theoretical territory to that of Goody (1968; 1977) and Ong (1982), although it was only Ong that explicitly accepted the McLuhanite axiom that media are powerful shapers of culture and consciousness. Their debates about the relation between political, social and mental organisation, and forms of communication technology, show less concern with the *what* and more with the *how* of communication. Anderson's (1983) work on the origins of nationalism inhabits a similar theoretical position. His notion of simultaneity is unimaginable without print, although he is less concerned by the content of the books and more with the potentialities of movable type.

In the light of our discussion about technological determinism, it can be argued that the medium theorists, especially those in the McLuhanite vein, endorse a position of causality in which the means of communication wholly shape culture or personality. Others, such as Goody, conclude that media of communication are important contributors to, or factors enabling, social change. Parry (1985) takes issue with this position, arguing that the features of social and mental life which Goody (1977) assigns to literacy do not hold good for traditional Hindu India. Instead, he suggests, the 'cognitive conservatism' which Goody suggests is a feature of literate culture is displayed in an *oral* religious culture orientated towards inter-theoretic competition, another aspect of literate culture in Goody's model (*ibid.*: 201). The benefit of Parry's article is therefore to provide a cautionary tale for those who seek to adopt a

determinist approach towards communication media as environments which engender particular forms of social life. He shows that what Goody regards as features of literacy can be found in oral cultures.

However, the suggestion that media constitute environments, rather than neutral conduits of information is a valuable one. Therefore, some attention should be focused on the form of communication apart from specific messages. The invisibility of the media environment makes attention to messages (the more tangible element of communication) more readily accessible and attractive to examine than the environment itself. However, it is the form or nature of a medium that is more instrumental in patterning social life especially because it has a quality of invisibility. As McLuhan put it, fish do not know of the existence of water until beached.

From the perspective of medium theorists the term 'media studies', in its usual sense, is clearly a misnomer because the media are a peripheral aspect of investigation. Instead of investigating the media, their particular characteristics and the environments in which they are used, the overbearing orientation of media studies has been with the textual characteristics of the medium. And, as I have suggested, popular reaction to media is most often organised around their texts: violent programmes or pornographic web-sites. Rarely is the media environment considered as important in its own right. Much of the debate about television encountered in Varanasi was concerned with the content of television in the new media environment. I have not ignored this fact but have sought to consider the place of television within homes as a medium not just a disseminator of texts.

However some of the earliest accounts of mass media concentrated on the nature of the medium, particularly its mass nature, but it can be argued that this criticism of mass culture was an attack on content by proxy. By targeting the messenger the message was attacked. The most famous proponents of the mass culture critique were Adorno and Horkheimer (1977) in whose theory the messages of all powerful texts are accepted by passive unreflective audiences. In this hypodermic model, where "the product prescribes every reaction" (ibid.: 361), the contents of the syringe-like medium enters the audience directly. Two key assumptions were being

made here: namely that the message was wholly undesirable in itself and would lead to an homogeneous and undifferentiated society. Further, that nothing mediates between the message and the viewer, that is, all individuals are the same, share the same biographies and concerns, and therefore consume, in unadulterated form, the same mass mediated message.

The restatement of variants of this mass culture thesis, in which the medium is equated with the content and both are considered as negative influences, was not hard to find in Varanasi. It was often suggested that television or cinema was for other lower forms of existence. There is a general ambivalence about cinema and other mass mediated forms, the former considered fit for the 'other', the undifferentiated mass (cf. Dickey 1993: 42-3; 141-2). Publicly cinema going was often disavowed, privately people admitted to being addicted to films.

Mass cultural forms were stigmatised in a way which was about more than mere content, and not just by cultural patrons of more 'traditional' or esoteric arts, though they are more vociferous in their criticisms. Judgements about content often turned out to be judgements about the medium. In the most extreme form some would argue that even the mythological stories were demeaned when they were shown on television. Evidently the more complex question of the class-based nature of cultural distinctions is at play here (cf. Bourdieu 1984), and this is revisited below.

At this point it is necessary to acknowledge that the medium plays an ambiguous part in accounts about mass media. In popular accounts of media, and not just in India, the medium itself is often singled out for attention in a way which suggests the content not the media is being attacked. However, since the mass society thesis was revised, critiques and studies of television have, historically, favoured attention to the content rather than the medium. This has led to detailed criticisms of television programming and research which sought to locate televisual effects within texts.

I have suggested that our attention must be focused on the historical and social circumstances in which technology is created and used. And, having considered insights which medium theories offer into television, it remains to summarise

critically the dominant currents in television analysis. The intention is to mark out a space from which an anthropology of television can operate. It is important to chart these textualist works, if only to establish foundations, because they have been central to television research but it should be recognised that ethnographic methods may have something different to offer.

Towards an anthropology of television: from text to context

Spitulnik has written that “there is as yet no ‘anthropology of mass media’” (1993: 293), which is not to say, as she recognises, that there is a paucity of theories about mass media. Her diagnosis, to date still more or less correct, is all the more pointed since mass mediation is one cultural form that is precipitating a general rethink as to what anthropology should concern itself with. As she, and many other writers across a range of disciplines are noting, “mass media themselves have been a contributing force in these processes of cultural and disciplinary deterritorialization” (ibid.). At the same time the challenge is to incorporate mass media into the complexities of everyday life.

Two immediate questions arise: can anthropology add to understandings of television generated in other disciplines and to what extent can it provide a special theoretical or practical handle on mass media? It is in order to answer these questions that we must navigate a course through some of the text based approaches to media analysis, before recommending that the space which anthropology is best suited to inhabit concerns the *contexts* of media use rather than the *content* of media.

The history of mass media research is one of pendulum swings from audience dependency to agency, from ideology to ‘semiotic democracy’ (Curran 1990), audience passivity to activity (cf. Morley 1995). Where audiences were once mindless dupes now they find scope for resistance and pleasure. Where a text once encoded ruling class ideology now there is semiotic polysemy. Perhaps the most striking resemblance between media theory and socio-political economy was the conjunction, in the 1980s, of free market models in which consumers reigned

supreme. The vocabulary here, as it was for the ideologues of the era, was of consumer choice, freedom and expression. In this respect the history of media theory represents something akin to an ideological weather vane moving with the spirit of the times¹.

From the mass culture thesis of Adorno and Horkheimer grew the sociology of mass persuasion and the 'uses and gratifications' approach. The former questioned the unbroken link between text and effects and established audience responses as the key to measuring effect. Hereafter, audience response became the major methodological component of future research (Morley 1992: 48). What emerged was a more qualified view of mass media power, in which effects were considered in terms of what came between the medium and the audience (Morley 1995: 298). The *process* of communication became the object of study.

In time, this approach evolved into the more subtle 'uses and gratifications' theory, which, succinctly stated, asked what people do to media, rather than *vice versa*. Rather than see the text as monovalent it was recognised through empirical work, which grew in complexity, that media messages could be variably responded to or interpreted (Morley 1995: 300). It was this variability of response and interpretation that earlier theories had discounted. In general 'uses and gratifications' theory, with some deviation, criticism and further theorisation has become foundational in the study of mass media and their audiences.

A more nuanced version of the uses and gratifications approach, one which employs ethnographic insight, is typified by Mankekar (1993a & b). In analysing the responses of viewers to programmes on the Indian National network she outlines the 'uses' to which mainly female viewers put such televisual fare. She charts what they are able to do with such texts and in so doing she constructs, perhaps in her own image, household viewers as concerned textual critics. They are 'readers' of texts

¹ The more significant point, in the present era, is the extent to which claims about the 'freedoms' that consumers or audiences enjoy act as a justification for imperialist expansion into cultural and media markets.

rather than casual watchers of television snatching moments of programmes when they are able to. She argues that “*intimate engagement* with Draupadi’s disrobing *enabled* them to rupture hegemonic constructions of Indian womanhood”, and later she writes that the disrobing “*compelled* them to confront and *theorize* their emotional, financial and sexual vulnerabilities” (1993a: 479, emphasis mine).

I cite this study not to deny its many insights (about which more below) but to remark on the ambiguous fashion in which such scholars themselves negotiate their texts, televisual and other. Here, the televisual text is enabling and compelling female viewers, creating scope for a critique and forcing them to confront their positions as Indian women. The power and the freedom are within the text, but what remains under-theorised is the extent to which the concerns of the analyst and her search for “viewers’ active negotiations” are obscuring the more mundane aspects of television viewing. The reader is left asking to what extent these really are the viewers’ interpretations.

Hall’s seminal article on encoding and decoding (1973) prefigures the textual orientation that was set to dominate work on television for several years. Hall argued for consideration of the meanings encoded within texts and viewers’ abilities to decode them; the varying codes (or repertoires) that different sections of an audience have at their disposal. A theoretical approach of this nature is adopted by Katz and Liebes (1990) in their study of cross-cultural readings of *Dallas*. They approach the question of the meaning of *Dallas* to Moroccan, Russian, Israeli and Japanese viewers through their retelling of episodes. Hall’s original model allowed for acceptance, resistance to or rejection of the encoded meanings based on the class position of the viewer. Through analysis of retellings and discussions. Katz and Liebes place ‘readings’ within a modified version of Hall’s three-way model.

Hall’s work led to consideration of the manner in which ‘texts’ positioned the spectator. For the ‘Screen theory’ of the 1970s the task was one of analysing the manner in which texts *interpellate*, or hail ‘readers’ (cf. Morley 1992: 60-64; Morley 1995: 303). Having secured the ‘reader’ in a particular subject position, ideology, be it patriarchal or ruling class, could be successfully transferred. For adherents to this

theory, there was no significant struggle between the 'reader' and text: the subject position of the 'reader' was predetermined by the text. 'Screen theory' represents the apogee of the text based accounts of mass media.

I have placed 'reader' in inverted commas to draw attention to a particular form of activity that such theories are assuming in the practice of television watching. That is, they concerned interpretation, usually of a specific programme by an individual viewer. In such textual accounts there is no channel surfing, no television dinners, no conversation around the set (and therefore no possibility that interpretative communities of viewers may exist), rather there is intense, and more or less solitary, cerebral activity on the part of viewers.

An account of television viewing in the domestic realm that employs any type of qualitative method, will quickly portray the act of viewing as different from the version presupposed by textual models. Instead, it will appear as a reflection and product of the domestic domain: the viewing of men and women, young and old will vary, according to time of day and types of programme available. Without locating television viewing within "the specific semantics of the everyday" (Bausinger 1984), the act of viewing becomes generalised and essentialised. The man who puts the television on to avoid his wife is unlikely to be 'interpellated' to the same degree as another more intentioned viewer. Grossberg (1987: 36) sums up the indifference of television viewing and the weakness it creates in textual theories of media:

Critics...fail to face the consequences of the limited concentration or interpretative activity invested in television...[they] continue to speak as though all the values they can read in the text are somehow magically inscribed upon the minds of the viewer.

In the face of such criticism the simple but important question of 'What does television watching actually involve?' must be asked. *How* television is watched is the question that my analysis poses above any other and one that opens up possibilities for an anthropology of television.

A space for the anthropology of television

The space for an anthropology of television is cleared by the recognition that attention to the text is insufficient in itself and that the meaning of television viewing is to be found in its actual practice. The tendency of media studies has been to shift the problematic of meaning between the text and the reader but the actual conditions of watching have largely been ignored. Even sensitive accounts (e.g., Morley 1980) have removed viewers from their natural settings for the purpose of interviews and discussions².

The comments of Grossberg were not a call for qualitative methodology, but for more realistic assessments about the reality of viewing. However, they did provide grounds for invoking the total social environment in which viewing occurs. Following Bausinger (1984), Grossberg questioned many of the assumptions in textual accounts: does watching television involve sitting down, does switching the set on signal intent to actually watch it, do people intently gaze at, or distractedly glance at the screen? In short, what else is going on around television sets and in the spaces where they are watched? How does viewing fit into the warp and woof of everyday life?

Once the actual context of viewing is invoked a much larger social field is opened up for analysis. If the structure and dynamics of daily life within households are considered as the context of television viewing, then questions of power, gendered divisions of labour, issues of access and control can be reappraised. For example, the idea that television is watched in an uninterrupted and concentrated manner, can be framed within questions about power relations in the domestic sphere (Seiter 1989: 234). The assumption of individual readers of televisual texts can be replaced by questions about how different family members bring different interpretative repertoires to the set and how these play out in the act of viewing. The asocial, ahistorical "textual determinism" that constructed the viewer as a prisoner of the text

² Katz and Liebes note (1990: 26) that Japanese couples were unlikely to watch *Dallas* together but for the purposes of their study they were asked to do so.

(Ang 1989: 99), can be replaced by the recognition that audience activity is “embedded in a network of ongoing cultural practices and relationships” (ibid.: 101).

Framing television within household life enables greater sensitivity to variations in households, their size, structure, economic and educational resources and how these might impact on the practice of viewing. Viewing can be approached as one amongst many other practices enmeshed within the symbolic and material spaces of a household. The meaning of viewing can be apprehended outside of the narrowly defined televisual text, and begin to include ideas about inter-textuality and household communication. The posters of television stars, or everyday discussions about the ‘real’ and ‘reel’ lives of characters in favourite serials are as much a part of the television experience as the watching of programmes. In fact, the way that these permeate to those that have little contact with the programmes compels us to further rethink the narrow textuality of prior television research.

In short, the world of television extends far beyond the screen and its immediate environs. A single television set can influence the whole organisation of a household: its meal times, daily communications and interactions, and the uses of available space. The television is part of the overall structure and dynamics of a household and feeds into these. We can only hope to understand television and its consequences if we think about it within the context of its total social environment. Particular programmes and their temporality are important (cf. Scannell 1988: 15-31) but must be considered in the context of the household and its relations with the neighbourhood and the world.

A space for an anthropology of television therefore opens up at the point where the textuality of television can no longer be assumed to be of primary significance and where the insights of medium theorists force us to consider the social and communicative environment that media engender. Television is not just a mechanism through which texts are pumped into households, wherein viewers have more or less ability to decode, interpret, resist, negotiate or contest, but is a technology that is part of the social fabric of the domestic sphere (Silverstone 1994: 78-103).

Television: a technology in and of the home

Now that we have moved beyond the text, it is necessary to think about some of the contexts in which television is situated in the domestic domain with the intention of pointing to the complexity of the media space that the household represents and of which television is a part. The work of Silverstone (1994) is most useful in this regard because he draws out two complementary yet discrete aspects of television: that it is a domestic object and a medium:

As an object it is bought and incorporated into the culture of the household for its aesthetic and functional characteristics, and it is displayed (or hidden) in the public or private spaces of the household, and collectively or individually used. As an object the television becomes both an element in a national and international communication network and the symbol of its domestic appropriation. As a medium, through the structure and contents of its programming as well as through the mediation of public and private spheres more broadly, it draws the members of the household into a world of public and shared meanings as well as providing some of the raw material for the forging of their own private, domestic culture (Silverstone 1994: 83).

The television as an object is incorporated within the household's spatial and aesthetic schema and marks out household spaces and their uses. The television as a medium is part of, and partly constitutive of daily life. Its schedules signal certain times of the day, the imminent family meal or bedtime argument.

The television as an object can mark out spaces as shared or private. The physical space that a television occupies in a house may speak of the importance that it holds in its owners' eyes as both an object and an activity. A television placed in an internal, private room may speak of the desire of its owners to restrict viewing to family members, to be seen to relegate it to a place of relative unimportance. A television, embellished and put centre stage in a room may pronounce the importance that its owners accord it, the possible centrality of it in their lives, as object and activity. Televisions, before they are even switched on, have massive communicative powers.

The viewing of television is enmeshed within an elaborate set of domestic practices which cannot be disaggregated from its spatial location or the social relations which

embody this space. A television mediates programmes and by so doing mediates between people. The resolution of the viewing demands of those present, or their negation, depends on where the set is, who is in the room, what time it is, and what is on television. It demands attention or attending to. People may pretend to watch to avoid domestic obligations or interactions (cf. Bausinger 1984), or pretend not to watch to avoid embarrassment.

The viewing of television, contrary to what textual accounts may have us believe, is often a shared activity not the preserve of a lone individual. Within the group of viewers power is unevenly distributed. Some may control what is watched, others know that their place is not to argue with such decisions. Some may feel obliged to sit tolerantly through a programme, others know that they can vociferously complain.

The complexity of the social setting in which television is most frequently implicated, the household, can be viewed in terms of the relationships in that household, of its spaces and temporality. Relationships of conjugality, between siblings and parents, or amongst siblings, are played out in front of the set and express cohesion or dispersal, authority and submission, freedom and constraint on the part of the viewers. The televisual relationships (though they are not just televisual) are conducted in differential domestic spaces that are restrictive or expansive, highly differentiated (a family viewing room or a room for children) or undifferentiated. Similarly the temporal dis-/organisation, routines or chaos of the house play a role in this social setting and its use of television (Silverstone 1994: 33). By focusing on a household, with particular daily routines and inhabiting particular spaces, it is possible to consider the ways in which it incorporates television into its daily life which, in itself, is a good way of understanding the family system as a whole.

The domestic sphere in the present work is largely that of the north Indian joint family. Such families, and their houses and routines, display a similar degree of complexity to those indicated in the abstract above. What this particular approach to family life and television allows in the Indian context is the scope to further understand the functioning of the joint family. It is an assumption of this work that

the joint family, although a resilient and enduring social form, is not a static unchanging entity. Nor has it ever been. By approaching the joint family 'through' the television screen it is possible to consider the context into which television has entered, and in which it must be accommodated, and more significantly, to consider the ways in which relations between family members may be reevaluated around the television. To anticipate two aspects of my argument illustrating this claim: the increasing frequency of television sets in dowry prestation and their subsequent placement in conjugal bedrooms signifies, at least spatially, a certain readjustment of this marital dyad within the joint family (although much more can be said). Secondly, relations between brothers and their wives, characterised by relations of avoidance and joking, render shared family viewing problematic. That it happens suggests a certain realignment or negotiation of relations between such family members.

Goodman (1983) has argued that television may be as good a way to understand family life and its interactions as food might once have been. There is scope for discussing the family through a combination of the two, or at least thinking through some parallels. The following section operates as a prelude to later, and more detailed consideration of parallels and interconnections between television, hearths and food in the household. Here the objective is to suggest ways in which ethnographic observation and analysis of the culinary domain can provide a point of departure for an ethnographic account of television in households.

Television and the hearth: televisual politics and gastro-politics

Thinking about television and viewing in terms of food can involve more than the observation that people have 'television dinners' and that both involve acts of consumption.

Approaching television as a social practice...is in some ways like observing how people take meals. Meals are ubiquitous, routine, domestic events that embody subtle ideologies of providence and sociality, apply complex rhetorics of arrangement and display, and stage occasions for a great variety of special comportment (Saenz 1994: 584)

Therefore, if we are seeking for fresh ways in which to think about television as a social practice of the household, food can offer a good way in. Both are apparently straightforward activities. Television watching, like eating is quotidian, 'ritual', altered for the benefit of guests, it iterates gendered and generational relations, and speaks of the educational and cultural resources of the household. Both are acts of consumption which go some way to defining those who partake in them.

Both television watching and eating are apparently mundane activities that involve the household as group, whether financially or commensally. Both activities involve transactions between people, both food and television mediate between people. A specially prepared meal can bring members of the household together, it may be the grounds for such integration, in the same way that a much loved old film can provide a pretext for family viewing. Special foods for children or extra generous portions and the granting of some televisual laxity (staying up late to watch the film) are comparable dispensations that reiterate the status of children and ideas about their upbringing. Withholding food from girls in favour of their brothers, and distinguishing types of programmes suitable for young males and females is an important aspect of gendering and role socialisation in the family. In Varanasi, women (and daughters-in-law especially) eat last and watch television only when others have had their televisual fill. Talking of their daily routines many said that they watched television only after making the bread (*roti*).

As objects televisions provide the warm flickering glow around which a household gathers. The television affords an opportunity for all to share an activity and this activity can symbolise their unity. The hearth or *chulha*, on which meals are prepared, provides food for all and represents a commensal unity. Both televisions and hearths therefore reflect and generate commonality in a joint family. However, as later chapters will show, additional television sets or hearths can represent the 'segmentation' or imminent or actual partition of a household.

There is a connection between temporality and culinary and televisual consumption, and both are inflected by the spatiality of their surroundings. The times family

members eat, the space they use to do so, and the impact that guests may have on their standard arrangements, are all significant in both respects. Family members may be fed in the kitchen, guests in more 'public' reception rooms. The serving of food may be rearranged so that the guests receive theirs before those usually first in line.

Culinary syntax is, like much repetitive everyday activity, relatively unreflected upon. But this is not to argue that the syntax cannot be put to use. Similarly, television viewing is, "no more casual and spontaneous than the family dinner. It is accomplished by competent actors with great improvisational skill" (Anderson, cited in Morley 1992: 184). As Appadurai (1981) has cogently argued, because food is an accepted and shared idiom through which relationships are expressed, it is a highly malleable, or semiotically versatile means through which to send messages. More significantly, food is prone to manipulation to express things but so is the context: "food can be made to encode gastro-political messages by manipulating the food itself (in terms of quantity or quality) or by manipulating the context (either in terms of precedence or of degrees of commensal exclusivity)" (ibid.: 501).

Literature on food in India not only reflects these general social, symbolic and syntactic properties of food and eating but also identifies the actual substance of food as of real significance. Ideas about food and its effects on the body, and moral or social status, are revealed in everyday practice and through medical and religious prescriptions and proscriptions (Appadurai 1988: 10). The ability to share food with people signifies similarity of bio-moral substance (Marriott 1968). As described below, the ability of people to watch similar programmes together assumes a similar likeness or is at least predicated on some degree of status symmetry. The transactional model of commensality that Marriott (ibid.) presents in terms of caste, or Khare (1976) presents for the household, could be loosely transposed onto television viewing.

The wrong types of food "prepared and served by the wrong person, eaten at the wrong time or place corrupt the body, rot the brain and spoil the character" (Parry 1994: 170), while prescriptions and proscriptions advise for or against certain foods at

certain times for certain people. As the grandmother of a household we meet below said:

We say to them [the children] that we can eat these sweets (*mithai*) but you cannot eat them. If we eat them there will be a benefit (*ḥayda*) but they will damage (*nuksan*) you.

This woman was not, in fact, talking about food in a literal sense but about television in a discussion about its moral and physical perils for children. In this social setting, the parallel between television and food can be extended beyond that of gastro- and televisual politics, as a social activity or transaction between people, but to the very substance itself. A person's moral qualities "are thought to be altered by changes in the person's body that result from eating certain foods...or falling under certain other kinds of influence" (Marriott and Inden 1977: 228). These words could be those of any number of people that I spoke to about television, particularly in relation to children³.

Gastro-politics (Appadurai 1981) and televisual politics can, it seems, stand up to sustained comparison. However, there are clearly some limitations to such an analogy: households have more control over what foods they provide for themselves than over what television programmes are provided for them. The question of gender further illustrates a weakness in the analogy since, by and large, women's role in the provision of food is much greater than in their decisions over what, and when, they watch television. However, by drawing parallels between these two forms of activity it is possible to argue that television viewing is about more than what people watch. It is a meaningful activity, one amongst a range of social practices within the household, that is variable and varied.

³ Many parents were prone to suggest that their children would quite happily eat nothing but chocolate (Cadbury's, not the indigenous Amul), crisps (Uncle Chips), Pepsi and Maggi noodles. A young couple remarked, with a sense of shame, that one of the first words their daughter ever uttered was 'Pepsi', closely followed by 'Frooti', the name of a mango drink. This is the preferred menu for contemporary children and one which stands in stark contrast to the rigorous and comprehensive ideas about food and eating.

The domestication of television in Indian households

The preceding two sections have argued that television viewing cannot be understood outside of the household spaces and relations in which it is based. Attention to the social contexts of viewing can illuminate the workings of the household. This section takes a step backwards and assumes that the arrival of a television, or connection to a cable network is an event which will entail some process of accommodation within the household. Attention to the processes through which television is incorporated and domesticated into households offers significant insight into the family system itself. What is presented here acts as a signpost towards fuller ethnographic illustration in later chapters.

Domestication: to accustom (an animal) to live under the care and near the habitations of man, to tame or bring under control, to civilise; to make to be, or to feel, 'at home'; to make or, or settle as, a member of the household (OED).

On the few occasions that I caught a glimpse of the interior of refrigerators in Varanasi I was struck by the scarcity of their contents, a scarcity very different from the bulging fridges of the television advertisements. It was rare to find more than a few chillies, a stub of ginger, some milk or curd and chilled water. On the television, fridges were sold on the basis of their storage capacity and delighted housewives willingly displayed their contents to the viewer. A minor line of enquiry began, premised on this disjunction. Why were fridges - in the estimation of one shopkeeper more sought after than that status symbol of old, the television - so often practically empty? The simple answer, which will suffice for our purposes here, is that ideas about storage of cooked food, particularly of defiled leftovers (*jootha*) and the predominantly daily basis of shopping yield fridges empty physically, if not symbolically.

The intention is not to return the discussion to matters culinary but to link up some of the theoretical and practical points with which this chapter has been concerned. My concern is to consider the processes of domestication that technologies, be they televisions or refrigerators, necessitate. Technologies are marketed with certain

cultural practices in mind, and, as Spigel (1990) shows, these are essential in allowing their owners to think through some of the possible applications they may have in their lives. However, as the example of refrigerators illustrates, the dominant 'use value' often runs counter to patterns of shopping and ideas about food.

The early section of this chapter argued that the use, meaning and potential effects of any technology are not preordained but arise out of an interaction between the socio-cultural contexts in which they are employed. The story of television in most households is one in which the television has to be appropriated according to household life and the ideas, routines and relations that pattern this domestic life. The word 'domestication' signifies the variable senses in which an object is accommodated according to these human habitats, how, in short, it is tamed according to the practices of those in whose habitat it occupies space.

In respect of both commodities and media offerings, Miller (1987; 1988) has considered this process, which he labels appropriation⁴, charting the ways in which objects are inscribed with local meanings as they pass into the household. It is a process through which they are rendered intelligible according to the needs and outlook of the household. His terminology stresses the 'taking for one's own use' involved in this process. This appropriation of meaning and its form or extent, "is a negotiation defined by and articulated through... the 'moral economy of the household'" (Silverstone *et al.* 1992: 17). Put another way, media and media offerings are filtered or engaged with, and gain meaning, in terms of the values of the household and its members.

In the contexts of television and of the Indian joint family this terminology is applicable for two primary reasons. Televisions provide a link "between households, and individual members of households, with the world beyond the front door" (*ibid.*:

⁴ In Miller's terminology, appropriation refers to the process through which commodities become objects and achieve significance. It signals their "active participation in a process of social self-creation" (1987: 215). The term domestication makes explicit what 'appropriation' leaves unstressed, i.e., that that process involves a commodity, medium or message leaving the formal economy and entering the *household*. Therefore, it emphasises the domestic aspect of the process.

15). Televisions are the nexus between two spheres of meaning: the household economy of meaning and, in the vocabulary of Silverstone *et al.* (ibid.), the formal economy of the outside. Secondly, there are particular kinship and status aspects of the relations within the joint family which play significant roles in patterning access to the television set(s) and frame ideas about programme appropriateness and how members should respond to content. The household as physical and social space is the point of consumption, the household as moral economy patterns the resources with which such consumption and negotiation occurs.

However on a secondary level, this terminology seems pertinent. Since the advent of satellite television, and the preceding period of commercialisation of the DD network, television programmes have been more inclined to provoke concern and embarrassment. These reactions are specifically linked to the relations between members of the joint family. Therefore household members have to negotiate with these new media and their offerings. The task is to find a place for television and its programmes within the house which does not interfere with the practical and moral nature of the household. If television is to coexist within the pre-existing routines and relations between people, then it must be worked on and around.

During fieldwork in Varanasi, the morality of India culture, symbolised *par excellence* by the joint family, was often counterposed to the amorality of Western (or Westernised) families as seen on television. Those Brahmanically inclined in the conceptualisation of their household, talked of its 'moral economy' in terms of *samskar*⁵, which can be glossed as referring to correct refinement, nurture and with regard to children, upbringing. It provides a sense of how a household, and its members should act and is suggestive of the particular morality of a household. While some household members articulated household morality through the idea of *samskar*, others drew on a more nebulous sense of appropriateness that was located and transmitted through the Indian joint family. Implicit in such ideas is the

⁵ *Samskar* denotes the sixteen life cycle rituals that perfect and refine individuals, and like *dharma* (caste duty) is viewed in relation to caste. Inden and Nicholas note that *samskar* "makes people" (1977: 37).

pre-eminence of the joint family as opposed to a nuclear one, of obedience to elders, of learning embedded and embodied within the household and its members.

In relation to media, some noted that children now learnt *samskar* from the television, rather than their parents and elders. As a young Brahman man put it, “*Samskar* is not safe in every house. Why not? New *samskar* is coming through the medium of television”⁶. This represents the juxtaposition of two diametrically opposed moralities. At the same time the Indian family system was held up as a bulwark against which such amorality would have to contend: “the joint family can protect India from the influence of satellite television”. There is a sense in which morality or appropriateness, embodied by the joint family, is opposed to this external, ‘other’ morality. The threatening morality is judged and acted upon in terms of this social and moral form of organisation.

The domestication of the savage television is, paradoxically, manifest in the television’s high visibility and invisibility. Televisions are pronounced features of rooms and household lives, and yet they are also just another (albeit ‘living’) ornament whose presence is barely noted. They become so part of the fabric and routines of the household that they no longer merit comment. Yet they can, at any time, draw comment, induce embarrassment or cause arguments.

Their invisibility implies the totality of their domestication. A woman in my neighbourhood, Lata, who commented that the television had “become another member of our family” (*hamara parivar ka ek aur sadasya ho gaya*), saw that the often belligerent television had been tamed or incorporated. Its position within the web of social relations of her household had been accepted. It no longer, in her opinion, interrupted relations between people. The anthropomorphism in this housewife’s comment on her television concedes both the socially constituted nature of the

⁶ A similar point is made by Gaurishankar Gupta in his article “Where is our young generation going?” (*Aaj* 28. x. 88, pg. 4). “The young generation feels no shame (*lajja*) or embarrassment (*sharm*) in singing obscene songs, watching obscene films or reading cheap novels in front of their parents or elders. And in the end why is this so? Only because they lack *samskaras*”.

viewing practices of the household and also the web of kinship in which the relations between a set and family members are suspended.

The set that has become a structurally invisible part of the house and its routines has become settled or tamed, made to live in accord with other members of the family. Yet it can quickly become a highly noticeable part of the household. 'Obscene' dance scenes, disagreements over whether to watch cricket or a film can invert its invisibility. The taken-for-granted nature of the television in the household suddenly evaporates; it takes centre stage when previously it had been unnoticed. The process of domestication has both long and short term characteristics: the illusory appearance of finality can be suddenly ruptured.

It may seem contradictory to be highlighting programming here since I have proposed that we view television less in terms of its texts, and more in light of the contexts of its actual use. However, the negotiation of the programming, the dialectic between programmes and people, represents a more ongoing process that is a crucial part of viewing. The chapters below which focus on social relations within households will suggest that programme content must be negotiated in terms of which family members are present. By highlighting relations between brothers, and their wives, adults and children, and cross gendered relations it will be possible to illuminate the nature of this programme-personnel dialectic in action.

By talking about this domestication of sets within the moral economy of the household we can evoke the contexts in which an object and medium is tamed, according to a specific moral outlook. Learning to live with television is about learning to find an appropriate place for it in the household: a place, literally, where it can be put and a position for it between members of the household. How does the television become part of the geography of the house, how does the unruly guest (and with satellite the rude and shameless guest) become "another member of the family"? These questions are ones whose answers are inseparable from a sense of the household as a social and moral institution.

Television and armchair anthropology

My intention in this final section is to reflect on the nature of research into television and the status of 'culture' in a world where the recent and rapid expansion of global media networks has created armies of armchair anthropologists.

A car crash and funeral in August 1997 brought home to me the implications of the object of my study and the limitations of my research. Like countless other billions I watched the funeral and became part of the imagined community of mourners, all mourning, (or watching people mourning) for a woman that they had never met. The oft quoted work of Anderson (1983) on print media and simultaneity seemed inadequate in such a situation. He drew attention to the sharing of a newspaper by members of a country. Here, it seemed, the world was reading the same line, of the same article, in a paper written in a common idiom, and doing so simultaneously.

There have been two discernible currents in analysis of the implications of the spread of media and communications networks. One, considers the role of media in cultural encounters, and particularly the power of western media to control the menu, if not the agenda. Some hypodermic models of media imperialism consider the cultural consequences of western domination of media markets (e.g., Mattelart *et al.* 1984). Others stress the power of different audiences to make their own meanings (e.g., Liebes and Katz 1990). A healthy balance between the two seems to be necessary, as does the recognition that the flow is not always one way but that most television audiences are message consumers not producers. The second approach stresses the reordering of experience and place in which global media are implicated (e.g., Meyrowitz 1985; Gupta and Ferguson 1997), the emergence of a 'television geography' (Rath 1985). It is this second approach that has most serious implications for anthropological theory and practice, and not just that which is explicitly concerned with media.

Anthropology has, for well over a decade, questioned the tropes of 'imprisoned native' (Appadurai 1988), of the unsullied village isolated from national, let alone global flows of capital, people, goods and information. The growing inapplicability

of the assumption that 'culture' resides in 'place' is now accepted, as is the reality that the world is no longer constituted by bounded cultural entities (Appadurai 1990b; Hannerz 1992) and can no longer be conceptualised as a mosaic of separate cultures (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). But as Wolf has argued (1982: 18), the *methodology* of anthropology (a single anthropologist, in one village, with limited time and scope for meeting more than mere representatives of the 'culture' therein) has dominated the discipline *theoretically*.

Several mechanisms are seen as forces through which the world is becoming 'smaller', its constituents increasingly connected, and cultural flows more widespread: world capitalism, global media flows; migration (Gardner 1995) and tourism. The world is now connected by flows of goods, currency, ideas and people. Anthropology has the task therefore of attending to ethnographic diversity whilst at the same time remaining alert to the much wider cultural flows that impact on the area of study. Indeed, it is the 'area of study' that is made problematic by the necessary recognition that culture today is both local and global and a complex hybrid of both. If the bounded area of study was the essential component of an ethnographic study, and there is a recognition that either such boundedness never existed (i.e., it was a figment of the anthropological imagination) or no longer exists, where does anthropology situate itself in such a globalising context?

The problem is necessarily most acute in the study of mass media because such studies rely on a 'place' in which ethnographic research occurs and must account for the mass mediation that simultaneously fragments the idea of a 'place', in the sense of a site in which any one culture resides. The face to face interaction on which ethnographic fieldwork is based must compete with the relations between consociates - those who we 'know' but have never met (Hannerz 1992: 30), and on the para-social interaction (Horton and Wahl 1956) that is a hallmark of a world inhabited by mass media networks. Of all the mechanisms identified behind such global flows, televisions appear as first among equals: they deliver advertisements of global products to the living rooms of the world and provide "proto-narratives of possible lives, fantasies which could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement" (Appadurai 1990b: 299). They advertise the goods,

show how diverse peoples have appropriated them, and suggest possible places for their purchase. In a world where electronic media have altered the meaning of 'place' (Meyrowitz 1985) televisions provide the transport, and sitting rooms act as the termini for dis- or embarkation.

Perhaps this then is where the critical interrogation of 'place' in a mass mediated world should begin: the sitting room (cf. Morley 1992: 270-89). Anthropology, since its disciplinary rationale lies in small scale observations of micro-processes, is well suited to exploring the actualities of household media use, in a globalising or any other context. This is not to argue that an anthropological study of television should begin and end in the armchair. However, having accepted that the meaning and impact of television is not merely textual, but rather more extensive than that, researchers should be willing to go further afield in search of their televisual material.

The most problematic aspect of the 'place' conundrum is that globality is still too unwieldy. However less attention has been focused on local manifestations of media change than on the global aspects of such change. By considering the implications of media change in Varanasi, by charting the relationships between cinema and television, between newspaper readers and homes, between 'traditional' performative events in the city and their counterparts in the televisual age it is possible to relativise the purported globality of these cultural forces and to look at their more local manifestations. The implications of Zee TV filming in Varanasi are at least as important, and interesting, as the interaction between the global mourners with which I began this section. It was certainly more amenable to research because I could attend the event, chart its coverage in the local papers, discuss the issues that arose in my local tea shop and talk to those who viewed the show when it was broadcast (and who had seen me amongst the audience).

One all important aspect of television is that it moves information, it does not store it. In light of this property of movement or transportation, and the other flows evoked above, we might want to counterpose such motion with the more static environment around it. This is not to suggest that there is no dynamism or motion outside the world of the television and the information it propels - far from it. Rather, it is to

suggest that studies of television should consider the 'places' where they are watched: the 'home' but also the world just outside the door. Subsequent chapters will detail the city of Varanasi, and the media operating within it, with the intention of considering in some more detail the epigraph at the start of the chapter. If there are only two places in the world, as DeLillo submits, an anthropology of television should look at the 'home' (the city or the house) in which the television is found and places on television against which the house comes to be defined. The following chapter will begin this task by offering the first in a series of sections which move in towards the home.

CHAPTER THREE

Locating Varanasi: a city and its spaces

Introduction

This chapter begins where the previous ended: with the suggestion that one way to approach television and its cultures is through an concentrated focus on the places and spaces in which it is watched. The previous section also left hanging what might be termed the 'conundrum of place' that faces anthropology. How can we remain committed to a methodology that would appear to undermine the ways in which we now encourage ourselves, and others, to think about contemporary culture?

Whilst familiarising the reader with the contemporary city of Varanasi I juxtapose several geographies of the city - religious, suburban, colonial, everyday and personal - in order to locate the city in history and my fieldwork in the city. I approach the question of place by considering the ways in which residents from different areas of the city map cultural and social practice onto these different part of the city. This chapter will therefore represent a journey through of the city streets and identifying sites along them. It describes the densely populated heart of the city and the more spacious outer areas of the city. This context setting, 'navigational' chapter, consciously evokes a centrifugal geography in order to contrast old city life with that of the residential colonies: the suburbs. In contrasting these areas I want to offer contexts for the cultural processes I will describe and how my locations (and acquaintances) shaped the material that follows.

The 'footprint' of an average satellite covers a large proportion of the globe but my focus in the chapter is a rather smaller area, a city or, more accurately, small sections of it. The contrast between the satellite and the city is instructive because this chapter seeks to provide a historical, geographical and cultural portrait which highlights how different 'places' support different senses of place. Through an investigation of suburbs, and what they represent, it seeks to think through the

tensions between located and dislocated culture that the 'city' and the 'satellite' appear to represent. It proceeds from the conviction that to understand the cultural process connected with television we need to grasp the local more clearly than ever.

Journeying through the city

Let us begin our journey at the river Ganges, the Ganga, or *Ma Ganga* as she is known locally. In Varanasi, the Ganga flows north through a twist on its journey towards the Bay of Bengal. The city is built on the western banks of a ridge sufficiently raised above the water level (even at flood times) to keep the city above the waters of the Ganga. It is this façade, a line of *ghats* (stone steps) facing east and the rising sun, that represents Varanasi, and often India, to the world. Although the city is ancient, (Eck 1983, begins her history in the sixth century BC), this façade, in the form seen today, is relatively recent. There are 84 *ghats*, some used more often than others, some in a better state of repair. These *ghats* stretch from Adi Keshava in the north, near the Raj *ghat* plateau, the site of first settlement, to Assi in the south. This façade lines, defends and defines the city.

A journey by boat from one end to another, from Assi *ghat* (where the Assi meets the Ganga) to the north, where the Varna flows into the Ganga, is a journey of four miles. En-route one will pass the spot where Tulsidas composed the *Ramcharitmanas* (the central text of north Indian Hinduism), the British water works, and folk fishing of an afternoon. Continue and pass the imposing Chet Singh *ghat* where the eponymous Raja escaped the clutches of Warren Hastings in 1781 while the future of north India was contested as the Mughal empire declined. Move on past Harischandra *ghat*, one of two cremation grounds in the city, then Kedar *ghat*, a central locating point in the city's religious geography. Before long you will arrive at Dasawamedh *ghat*, the busiest of the ghats where most visitors first take *darshan* (sight) of the Ganga. Priests sit beneath umbrellas instructing pilgrims and masseurs ply their trade on unsuspecting tourists. Men come and go, with a packet of *pan* to chew after a bathe. Continue on, passing a man rowing with a radio tuned to film music, until plumes of smoke signal Manikarnika *ghat*, the cremation ground that marks the

site of Vishnu's austerities, those which created the universe at the beginning of time¹. Further on one reaches Panchganga *ghat*, located beneath an imposing mosque from Aurangzeb's time. Continue down river and other *ghats* pass by until established structures merge into trees. The huge Malviya bridge looms, and a train making its way to Calcutta passes overhead.

The river is one place to start, and for many it is the *sine qua non* of a visit to the city. In addition to mortuary rites that will be performed for dead relatives, most pilgrims will make the *Pancha tirthi* pilgrimage in which the river is the central locating element. The Ganga washes away the sins of those who bathe in her and death in the city ensures *moksha* (liberation) from *samsara*, the endless cycle of rebirth (Parry 1994: 26-30). Centuries of writing, from the Sanskrit *Kashi khanda*, to the writings of visitors, colonialists and scholars have filled many thousands of volumes. Much of this work is centred on religious aspects of the city and on the Ganga. My work can do no justice, even by way of summary, to these works nor does it take as a central theme the Ganga or the religious activity associated with it. For that the reader is asked to look elsewhere (e.g., Chandramouli 1995, Eck 1983, Hertel and Humes 1993, Prinsep [1831] 1996; Parry 1994, Sherring 1868, Singh 1993, Sukul 1974). Since we will return to look at geographies of the city in which the Ganga is implicated, let us disembark from our boat at Dasaswamedh and explore some of the streets in the city; thoroughfares more central to my account.

Past steps lined by alms collectors one quickly meets the broad road that leads to Godaulia crossing. At any point an alley can be followed into the city that is a labyrinth of lanes. One who knows the city and its alleys (*gallis*) can traverse the city from north to south barely using a major thoroughfare. Those who do not are liable to get quickly lost. For many this is the preferred way to navigate the city, passing friends, temples and tea shops along the way. It is in these alleys, amongst the bustle, pilgrims, and cows where the *joie de vivre*, an insouciance known as *mast* is to be found. *Mast* represents to Banarsis the spirit of life in this, Shiva's city. It was in this

¹ For a discussion of death and its associated specialists and rituals cf. Parry (1994).



Plate 3: 1. Rickshaws and advertisements at Goudaulia crossing.

carefree spirit that one man said to me: “Varanasi is the city where people come for *Kashi labh* (the ‘profit’ of Kashi, salvation through dying in the city) but instead find life (*zindagi*)!”.

Many take cycle rickshaws around the city and rickshaw pullers congregate at Godaulia crossing, avoiding the sticks of traffic police charged with keeping the traffic flowing. Take a ride and go straight on and you will get to another crossing, marked by a derelict church from 1820, a crumbling remnant of British religious activity in Varanasi. Continue and you will pass through Luxa, the Ramakrishna mission hospital to Rath Yatra crossing. Turn right at Godaulia crossing and you start the ascent up to *Chowk* (the market centre in the indigenous quarter of north Indian cities). Past Banspathak, centre of television and electrical shops, and by now your rickshaw puller will be doing just that, pulling the vehicle. Had you turned left you would be following the road which leads, almost unbroken down to Banaras Hindu University² (BHU) in the south.

Imagine, then, the Ganga and a road running roughly parallel to it. Between the river and the road is dense, compacted housing. On the other side, too, there is housing. On both sides of the road it becomes less dense the further south you travel. The road is periodically broken by crossings but continues and were one to follow it parallel to the river it would lead to Raj *ghat*. A less peaceful journey could be taken by boat, avoiding the traffic but also missing the glorious chaos, the functioning anarchy of the streets.

Maps...betray the designs of those who create them. [T]hey bear little resemblance to the personal maps we draw with our feet as we go about our daily occupations (Ossman 1994: 31)

This geographical orientation is not *the* local one, in that there are as many ‘maps’ of the city as there are people. It is necessarily my mapping of a large city as I grew to know it: a key employed in the field to locate myself, and in this text to guide the

² This university was established in the early years of this century by Indian nationalists. As a major employer, and academic and political centre it has a strong presence in the city. For a recent account that touches on BHU and north Indian society and politics cf. Mishra (1997).

reader. I choose this road-river parallel to work through some geographies of Varanasi.

Other Banarsis may have other much more extensive mappings of their city; ones that include points of reference defined by their kin, non-kin, temples, *ghats*, shrines or sites for family picnics and the festivals of their community. However, within these geographies exist other ways of seeing the city: ones that might centre on the municipal and political division by wards (of which there are eight, each containing circa fifty neighbourhoods, *mohallas*). Other geographies might address the *mohalla*, or religious and linguistic communities resident in them, geographies of the local neighbourhood where temple, mosque, *mazar* (Muslim shrine), *akhara* (wrestling club), park, well or pond and *hawelli* (mansion) are the defining icons of the locality (Kumar 1988: 71). The mappings of men and women would similarly portray the different potential for their movements across city space. Other mappings might revolve around Shiva's presence, in which mythology is central in defining Varanasi as the ultimate cosmopolis: where mythological time meets the spaces of the city (cf. Singh 1993). For Varanasi is a site of intersection between celestial and human worlds, a *tirth* or crossing place, literally a ford for traversing between these two worlds.

By foregrounding a rather different geography of the city, which draws on a tradition of colonial cartography (namely the maps of Prinsep (1822) and Ryder (1918-9 & 1928)) and centres less on religious aspects of the city, I want draw attention to differences in the social spaces of the city. I intend to use the concept of suburb to highlight the ways in which the changing landscape of the city is used by its residents to place themselves within the life of Varanasi. I take my lead, self-consciously, from Nita Kumar's (1988) sensitive portrayal of the artisans of Varanasi, and from the understanding that space reflects and imposes on values, ideas and activities which themselves act to define a city and constituent communities within it.

Studies of media (e.g., Meyrowitz 1985) and of globalisation usually employ metaphors of space and place. By invoking a relationship between culture and place it is possible to examine the changing nature of their relationship. Moreover, by historically localising the relations between space, place and culture in Varanasi I

hope to set the scene for an examination of cultural change in the city in the age of television culture. I argue that peoples' experiences of the social landscape of the city become central in mapping their relationship to cultural and social change as it affects 'their' city. There are continuities in the cultural geography of Hinduism and Varanasi that are unaffected by such developments. Other cultural forms in the city would appear to have undergone transformation as the spaces of the city have changed.

After providing the reader with some more details about the history and evolution of Varanasi, and its landscape, I will turn to these claims about culture and place through an examination of suburbs in the city.

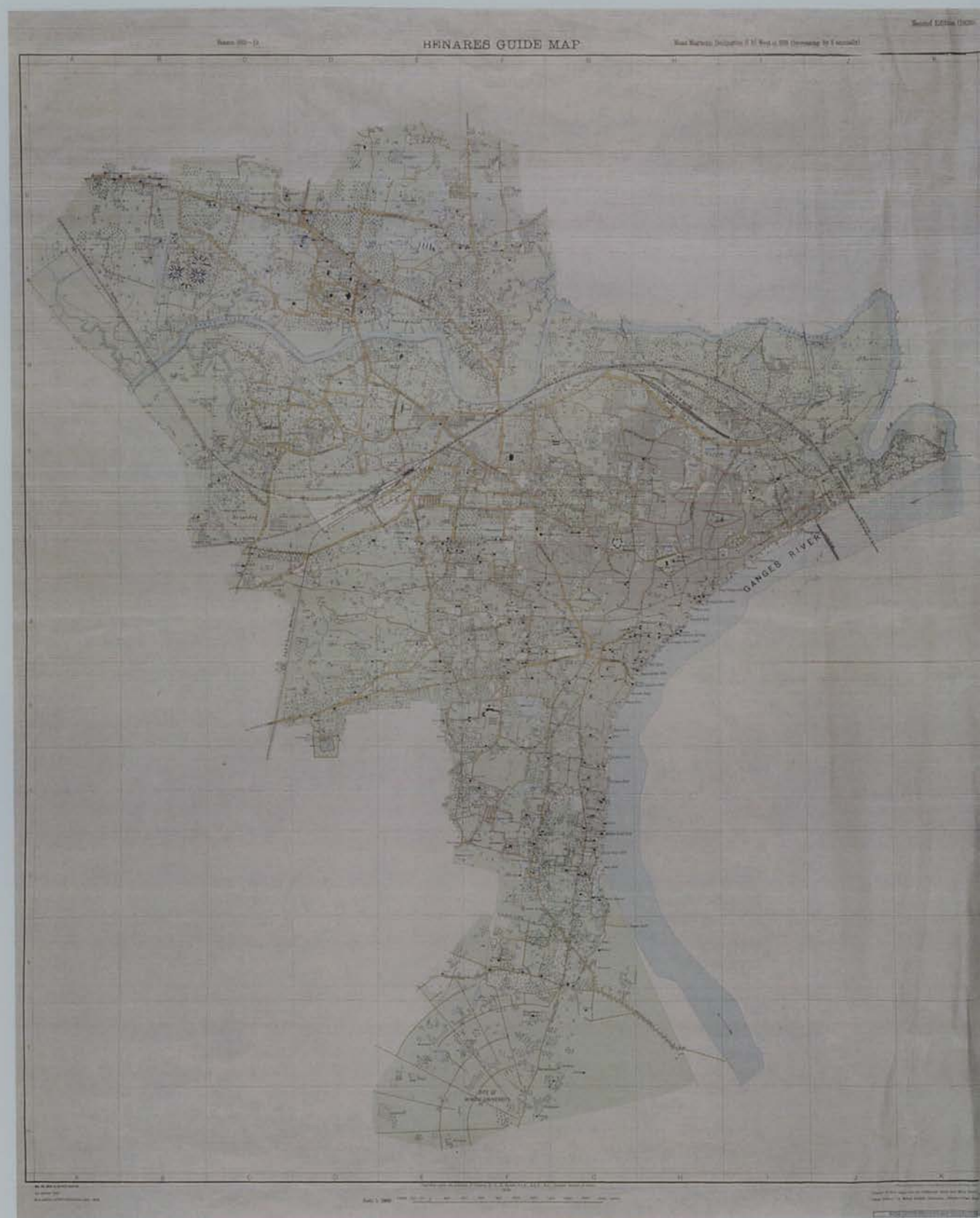


Plate 3:2. The city in 1928.

The social landscape of the city

The city has many names which underpin various geographies of it. Varanasi, the post-independence title of the city³, signifies the area between the Varna and Assi rivers. The city is also known as the *Mahashmashana*: the great cremation ground where the world began and the place that will survive the end of time. *Kashi* is the name of the city bounded by the Panchkroshi road, a pilgrimage route around the city. *Adimukta*, never forsaken, signifies that this is the place in which Shiva remains, even at the end of time. Varanasi is said to be pre-eminent among the seven holy cities (*saptapuri*) of India while all the remaining six can themselves be located within the microcosmic geography of the city (Eck 1983: 285). It is also said to contain the four abodes (*dhamas*) of the gods (ibid.: 288-9). These are, depending on whom one asks, either Sanskritic or popular (*laukik*) views of the city.

And there is the name *Anandavan*, 'the forest of bliss', the very reason Shiva made it his city and vowed not to forsake it, a place of verdant, luxuriant groves and running water. Here was the mythical beginning of Kashi in "the forest paradise to the south" (Eck 1983: 29), not the comparatively later settlement, now partially excavated, at Raj *ghat*. Hieun Tsiang, a Chinese traveller of the seventh century noted the leafy trees and the predominantly green landscape of the city. The expansion of the city, from a place where "leafy trees shaded temples and shrines, and streams of clear water flowed in all directions" (ibid.: 79) to the city it is today, is well illustrated by the example of Madanpura ward. Now firmly a part of the bustling city centre it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a *mauza*, a rural administrative unit (Kumar 1988: 68). The river front, a principal aspect of the city, is largely a creation of the Marathas of the eighteenth century (Eck 1983: 90) but even at the beginning of the twentieth century much more was forested than at present.

³ The etymology of 'Varanasi' is much debated (cf. Eck 1983: 27). The Padma Purana proclaims that "The illustrious city of Varanasi is bounded on the north by the Varna and on the south by the Assi" (Singh 1955: 2).

Recall this name *Anandavan*, evoking Edenic groves, running water and green Elysian fields. Also, consider the maps overleaf which illustrate some of the changes which were afoot in this era and that have an impact on our story. Primarily as a result of British intervention during their period of connection with the city, lakes were drained and parks created, streams and rivers around the city dried up or were diverted. The Godaulia river which flowed into the Ganga by Dasaswamedh *ghat* was transformed into a road. Tanks, which had been used for domestic water supply, were drained. These transformations were followed by the domestication of water with piped supplies beginning, in 1895, from the Gothic revival water works in Bhelupura (Kumar 1988: 107)⁴.

Prinsep's map shows a large number of gardens, the majority of which are annotated with the name of an Indian owner or patron. These appear as very stylised, well kept grounds on the map though the real extent of their formality and the question of access to them is not possible to deduce. Comparing this map of 1822, with those compiled under Ryder in 1928, the striking change is the transformation of these lakes and tanks into parks. A garden and lake with 'tame turtles' has, by 1920, become the Town Hall *maidan*⁵, and the central police station. A garden which was, presumably, a place of social contact for the Anglicised élite became either a site of political association during the rise of mass politics (cf. Haynes 1991) or the site of municipal buildings. Similarly, the Benia *talab* (lake) becomes Victoria Park, and under a new name remains a well-used park in contemporary Varanasi. The transformations and subsequent uses of these urban spaces accord with Kaviraj's (1996) observations about the increasing plebianisation of public space in Calcutta and the increasingly domestic orientation of middle-class existence.

⁴ cf. Kumar (1988: 107, and *passim*) on the domestication of water, *mohalla* water supply and the general importance of water (both in quantity and quality) in Varanasi.

⁵ A maiden is an open space in an Indian city which is used for a variety of purposes but particularly political gatherings.

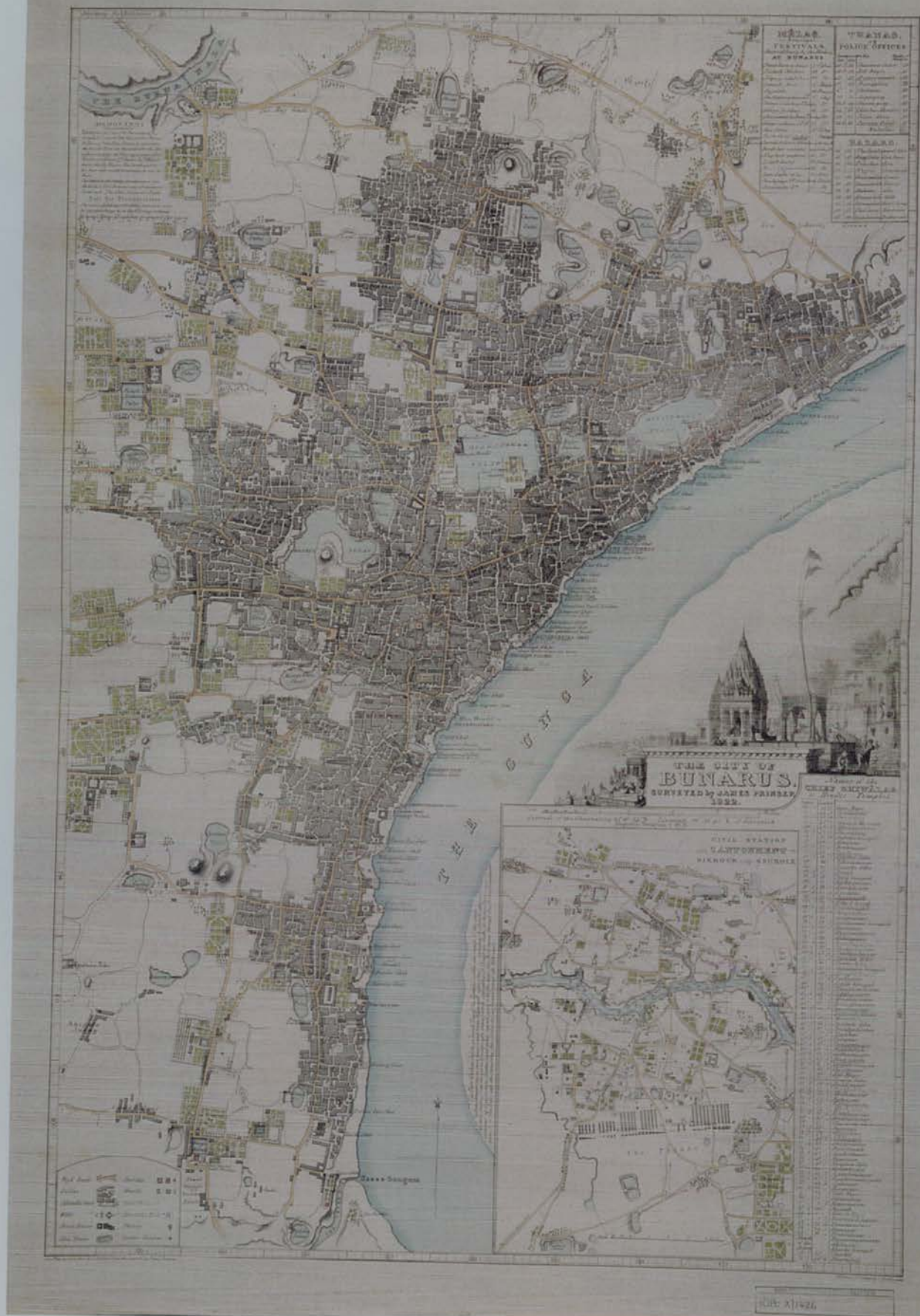


Plate 3: 3. Prinsep's 1822 map of 'Bunarus'. Note the number and size of parks and gardens, and the substantial open spaces.

In addition to the changes to the landscape of the city made by the British we should also consider population totals. Prinsep had estimated in 1829 that there were some 31,000 houses and a population of 181,482⁶, and reports a large increase of Mirzapur stone produced for Banaras between 1802-16 (Bayly 1974: 489). By 1881, in what Singh regards as the first reliable census, the population was 218,573 and had grown to 355,777 by 1951 (an increase from 1881 of 62%). By the 1991 decennial census, Varanasi, or more accurately the 'Varanasi Urban Agglomeration', had reached a population of 1,030,863 with a density of 471 per km² (Govt. of India 1991). Alongside Kanpur and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh it is a "million city".

What is clear, from a brief survey of these two maps, is a growth of the core of the city. Lakes have become parks, gardens replaced by housing. Areas which in contemporary Varanasi are housing colonies, apartment blocks and commercial or residential complexes were groves, fields and forests. It is for this reason that, of all the names for the city, and the contrasts with its contemporary form they evoke, I find it useful to dwell on this name - *Anandavan* - forest of bliss, because it draws attention to a process which continues to this day: an expansion from the core of the city outwards which has changed the appearance of Varanasi. This growth is hardly a unique occurrence; cities rise and fall, and one that rose as the premier pilgrimage site in India and a major commercial centre in eastern Uttar Pradesh is likely to have grown both in area and population. What is important is the coincidence of such growth in a city where flowing water, open space, and tranquil areas are central to a sense of identity (Kumar 1988). Moreover, patterns of housing across the city are different in areas of later expansion and these different architectural and residential spaces are suggestive, as Blake argues (1986: 70), of the different structure of political, economic and social relationships of those living within them.

Before considering the different spaces of the city, and the implications these might have on matters of identity, let us look at some selected history of the city to help

⁶ Comparable figures are available for Delhi, 125,000 in 1830, and Allahabad, 52,000 in 1838 (Bayly 1975: 489-90).

ground the reader and to consider the historical context of the social and spatial organisation in the contemporary city which is most important to the account.

Bayly (1975: 499) cites the history of a Banaras family whose ancestor migrated to the city in 1810. Struck by the overwhelming tranquillity of the city, he decided to remain in it. The preceding years, though, had been ones of turbulence and growth. With the decline of the Mughal empire, Banaras became the centre of a small quasi-independent successor state (Freitag 1989a: 7), and this period saw the emergence of the city as a major commercial centre, located en route between Bengal and the Maratha territories. By 1775 the British had taken over Varanasi from the Nawab of Awadh without attempting to rule the city directly. Rather, a powerful triumvirate was at the reins: a religious, commercial-merchant, land-holding group. They were the Gosains: mendicant soldier-traders who combined piety and commercial interests, ensuring that trade and pilgrimage routes remained open. Joined by merchant-bankers, and a local powerful Bumihar Brahman *zamindari* (land owning) dynasty that would later become Rajas over the princely state, this triad of mixed interests coalesced into what scholars have termed the “Hindu merchant style” (Freitag 1989a: 11).

This period of power shifts had been preceded by 500 years of Mughal rule and the city had been christened Mohammadabad by Aurangzeb, although this name had never stuck (Eck 1983: 83). The city described by most visitors in the last two centuries is the post-Aurangzeb city, a city with mosques and other Islamic social features and one carved out by British road construction. Histories of the city have tended to accent the Aurangzeb period as one of destruction and desecration, and Hindu-centric research has tended to continue this ‘Othering’ and marginalisation of the Muslim population. Although my work, at least in domestic contexts, is predominantly focused on Hindu life, much of what is described of public contexts and their relationship with home life is also applicable to Muslim residents.

However, it does seem clear that the cultural patterns established by the Mughals, and later fostered by the Nawab of Awadh created a ‘Mughalising city’ (Bayly, in Freitag 1989a: 9) of Varanasi. Physically this is manifest in organisation by *mohalla*

(neighbourhood), and by the Islamic architecture and shrines. Culturally, a conspicuously united pan-Banaras tradition emerged. Artisans and the lower orders, significant numbers of whom were Muslim, were incorporated into this pan-city culture, as were the élite until they withdrew in the early part of this century (cf. Kumar 1988: 232-3). A striking example is the festival of Moharram: strictly speaking this is a Shi'ite event, but in Varanasi 90 per cent of Muslim participants were Sunni and were joined by Hindus (Freitag 1989b: 27). It was, therefore, at once both an Islamic and Banarsi occasion. Therefore, contrary to dominantly Hindu accounts of the city (e.g., Eck 1983) Varanasi is an important place for other religions too⁷:

[F]or Muslims the city [Varanasi] is the 'flower of earthly existence' because this is where the faithful can find the basis of social life - the mosque, running water for purity, learned *qazi's* to settle disputes, and the Sultan to protect the *umma* (religious community) (Bayly, cited in Freitag 1989a: 5).

We have a picture, then, in this period at least, of a markedly synthetic city. Social organisation in the Mughal era was based around the *hawelli* (mansion) in a *mohalla* and service-client groups in clusters around it. In the eighteenth century, with the decline of the Mughals, this form endured and caste and craft groups gathered in specific areas (cf. Kumar 1988: 67, fig. 3). There were ruptures in this smooth picture, but as Freitag has convincingly argued, some instances of trouble between religious communities, e.g., the riots of 1809 and 1810-11, which have been seen as instances of Muslim-Hindu riots, are better viewed as expressions of civic unity and as "the readjustment of power relationships in an urban site undergoing significant political change" (Freitag 1989b: 51). It is worthwhile to dwell on this sense of unity between populations in the city for it remains a marked aspect of contemporary life in the city. Kumar (1988: 222), for example, notes the lack of riots in the city between 1831 and 1931 when they were sporadic across the United Provinces⁸.

Having considered some geographies of the city, some of its long and complex history, and the combined results of British intervention and population growth we

⁷ The Muslim population of Varanasi is currently c. 25 per cent (Govt. of India 1991).

⁸ The larger and more complex question concerning the emergence of communalism lies outside the scope of this brief history (cf. Freitag *op. cit.*, Pandey 1990).

are now in position to return to the city I grew to know during my fieldwork. The principal aim is to consider patterns of residential settlement in the city with a view to illustrating the importance, in social and cultural terms, of these differences in the contemporary city. The two primary residential areas in the city I discuss are the 'old city' and the colonies, to which I attach the appellation 'suburb'. It will be shown that these residential locales support very different forms of social life and are central in their residents' formulations of their 'place' within the city.

Mapping the city

Moving from the quasi-rural Nagwa to Shivala *mohalla* I needed some maps. Even navigating a route between my new flat and the river, a distance of barely five hundred yards, was something of a trial. I decided to attempt some amateur cartography, reasoning that the exercise would provide a means of getting to know people too. The map never got finished, although by the time I gave up I had a pretty good sense of my immediate surroundings and why the map was barely feasible. And I had met people too. I spent many hours, day and night, at one of the tea shops in this locality and, once the vendors in the region knew that I had developed a taste for it, much time avoiding the offers of *pan*, the all-important 'communicative lubricant' of Varanasi. My first 'media-use' survey commenced in Shivala and adjoining *mohallas* and it was to this area of the city that I felt I most belonged. In time Shivala would become, unequivocally, my neighbourhood.

Shivala is about ten minutes rickshaw ride from Godaulia. The rickshaw first passes through Madanpura, technically a *mohalla*, but the name now given to a whole, predominantly Muslim area. Further down this road, outside the Bengali tola Inter-college, hordes of school children swamp drinks vendors at break time. The road here is poor and traffic further slows at Municipal attempts at traffic control: speed bumps. The road is gradually widening and the rickshaw gathering pace. In the distance the faint cries of '*Ram nam satya hai*' (God's name is truth) can be heard from those carrying biers to Harischandra *ghat*. The funeral procession turns down the road towards the river, opposite the massive, and newly renovated Rashtriya

Sahara press office. Tucked in an alley by this turning is Kali's tea shop where folk sit outside chatting and cows rummage enjoying their 'leisurely sovereignty' (Eck 1983:19). Down the road towards the Ganga, water buffaloes await their daily bath. The theme of the hit film *Raja Hindustani* can be heard from a barber shop, where young men attend to their quiffs before roaming the neighbourhood. To the left, the *mohalla* of Sonapura, home to Bengalis and various south Indian communities and the Kedar temple. To the right a south Indian temple signifies the similar regional origins for those living in Hanuman *ghat mohalla*. Straight ahead there are piles of wood, jeeps and silently stoic relatives unloading bodies.

This is the 'old city'. Receiving a guest in my rooms during the heat, I was reminded that the 'old city' means cool living in narrow alleys the sun cannot enter. From here towards the south of the city, housing becomes progressively more spacious; the alleys are wider and the style of house slightly more expansive. Singh's description of houses in these areas, curiously similar to that of Heber⁹ (who was reminded of Chester) is still fitting, even if lodged in the past tense:

[The] majority of the pukka houses were lofty with two or three storeys and several of them as high as five or six storeys. Their entrance was at a considerably higher level than that of the streets. They were richly embellished with verandahs, galleries, projecting oriel windows and very broad and overhanging eaves supported by carved brackets (1955: 34).

In most areas of the old city the alleys are too narrow to admit even cycle rickshaws and buildings too tall to allow sustained attack by the sun. Housing is compact and population density very high. The alleys are punctuated by periodic shrines, piles of decaying rubbish and small stalls. Writing about 'Delhi and other cities of the north' (1993: 124) Bayly notes that, in the late eighteenth century, British administrators drew misinformed parallels between the state of buildings and the health of civic life. The crumbling façades of the former they equated with the ill health of the latter. He suggests that the apparent meanness was not a reflection of poverty but a feature of patterns of consumption and the same could still be said. The crumbling houses of the old city are as likely to be home for rich merchants as they are to a group of

⁹ Heber's account is based on travels in the 'Upper Provinces' of India in 1824-5. cf. Eck (1983: 13).

affluent, unrelated tenants. What Bayly correctly identifies in respect of houses, a disregard for external appearance, is considered a defining feature of the general attitude of those that live in the old city. Residents of these areas are apt to claim that values (religious or community spirit) are more important than outward impression. In this regard, they draw strict (and often caustic) parallels with the houses and residents of the colonies I discuss below.

For a description of houses from the outside we can do no better than quote Padfield's description:

In passing through the streets...one notices at once that there are few windows, if any at all, looking out upon the street, and those that may be are often placed high up in the wall, out of all reach of passers by...Often there is nothing presented to the public road but a blank wall with a more or less imposing doorway...The chief feature in the building is that it must be in the form of a square, with an opening to the sky in the centre...In large houses, this...space will form a regular courtyard, whilst in small buildings...it is only a few square inches (1896: 16-7).

Houses fitting this description may be occupied by a single joint family, although they are often practically and economically unviable. Where family partition has occurred, each conjugal group may take a floor to themselves and share common facilities. Often straitened circumstances, or occupational mobility within a family, leads to the leasing, to several unrelated tenant families, of a floor or some rooms. In this way many such houses, once occupied by a single joint family, may be home to one or two families on each floor. Residence in the old city does not necessarily entail residence in a grand house. Most families are likely to be sharing property with kin or non-kin and conditions may be more cramped than the tenor of this description suggests. By the same token other houses are much smaller and of less aged provenance. Building work is a frequent sight with houses extended skywards due to the limits of space.

The Pandey's house in Hanuman *ghat*, where I spent long mornings watching soap operas and discussing national politics with Mr Pandey, offers a good example of 'old city' living. They rent four ground floor rooms having moved from Bareilly after Mr Pandey's retirement from the railways. On one such hot and lazy day we were

watching the cricket on television and swapping the daily newspapers whilst Gayatri put the finishing touches to her granddaughter's new frock. We could see the television screen, and the world as it passed by outside. A vendor called, Gayatri hollered to her daughter-in-law to check if vegetables were needed and we looked on, as the Tamil family opposite took the salesman to task for overcharging. Gayatri joined in the playful abuse as did, it seemed, another woman keeping an eye on the world from her doorstep down the way. The vendor moved on, cursing, as the conversation of the householders continued to ricochet around the alley.

The alleys of these areas represent an almost seamless continuum of buildings that is punctuated by the movement or activity of their residents. This seamlessness is determined, variously, by the relations between residents and their neighbours. Doors may be open or shut, depending on the time of the day and the position of the sun. The steps between alley and home provide an ideal locus for spectating and talking. Therefore the houses, many of which are quite imposing and 'closed' from the outside are opened up through the daily interactions of their inhabitants. All this represents something of a contrast to life in a residential 'colony', not more than five minutes bike ride away.

Picture a father taking his kids to drink Pepsi at the end of the street. He beckons them to get into the car. The gates of the house swing open and they travel four hundred yards down the street. Stopping at the shop, he gets out of the car and returns with the bottles. Several minutes later, when all are finished, the empties are handed back. The car turns round and heads off home. Here the physical and social space of Varanasi is altogether different. There is little activity between houses which are separated from the roads, and their neighbours, by walls and fences. There is no labyrinth of lanes here and none of the animation that defines life in the old city, instead broad roads and a rather an eerie quiet. This is Ravindrapuri colony.

A note on the word 'colony', the usual name for a 'new' housing area in urban India, is necessary. Like imperial territories, these residential areas often have a founder who claims dominion over an area by purchasing it. The land, often a field isolated

isolated from other habitations, is mapped, divided, and then sold in lots, though colonisers rarely sell all the land immediately, instead preferring to wait until the value of their holding has risen. In many colonies¹⁰ in Varanasi, the home of the 'coloniser' is often recognisable in several ways: it stands at the main point of entrance to the territory, is often noticeably larger and more imposing than any other, and finally a small plaque on the gate often reveals that it is on 'plot number one', the frontier home.

Ravindrapuri colony is not far from where I lived in Shivala, to the west of the main, arterial Assi-Godaulia road. It was established in the 1960s on what was previously an orchard, renowned locally for its plums. The Ryder map of 1918-9 show clearly that this entire area was partially forested or otherwise open space (cf. Plate 3: 4, map ref. Af & Ae). It is based along a wide road, divided into two lanes by a central barrier. Periodically there are roundabouts, decorated with statues of independence era heroes. The first perception of this colony is that of quiet, of an unfamiliar lack of people or traffic. The few people to be seen are sari workers drying their threads, taking advantage of the expansive areas needed for this work.

The people within Ravindrapuri are extremely wealthy with large disposable incomes greatly exceeding those of most, but not all, old city inhabitants. They are white-collar workers, professionals, owners of 'fancy' sari shops. The children of those that I surveyed, without exception, attend the English-medium convent schools. This colony, because of its proximity to Shivala, was the one that I investigated in my preliminary survey. My experiences there, even with a chaperone, were not wholly encouraging and thereafter my experiences of colony life were guided by a desire to only visit families with which introductions had been made.

¹⁰ According to the 1998 *Kashi Tradika* (an almanac of the city) there are sixty colonies. Many of the colonies have names which reflect the idyllic spaces they offer their residents, and which, paradoxically, their establishment removed from the city. A sample include: *Sundarnagar* (Beautiful city); *Suryanagar* (Sun city).

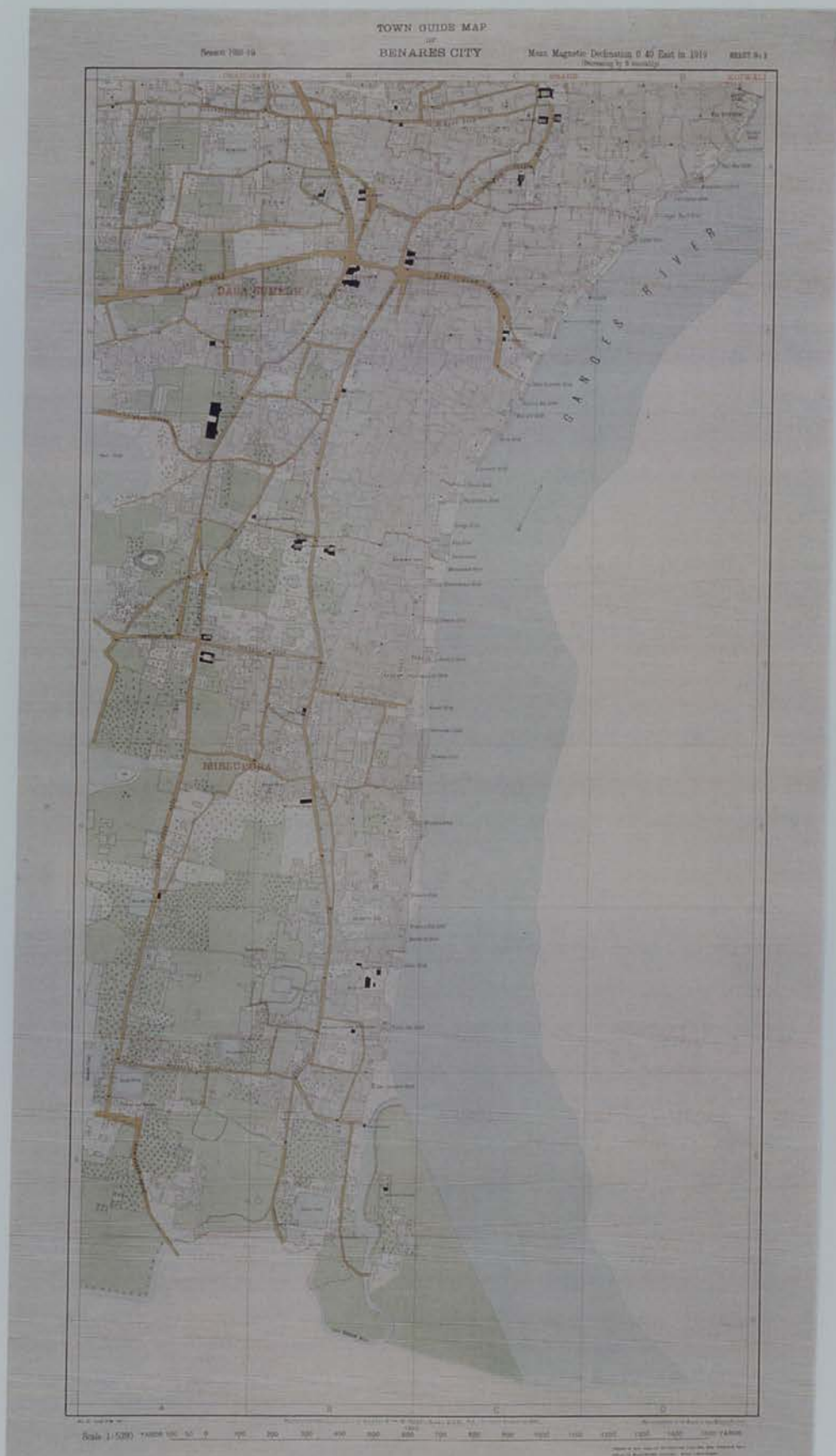


Plate 3: 4. A section of the Ryder map of 1918-9, showing the southern section of the city. Ravindrapuri colony stands on the area directly below the name of the *Bhelupura* ward. (The later 'Ravindrapuri extension' colony now covers square Ag.).

Houses in Ravindrapuri colony are arranged down roads running perpendicular to the main avenue. Systematic ordering by odd and even numbers makes finding one's way quite simple. Throughout my period of fieldwork I was struck by the glaring juxtaposition ^{of} ~~with~~ the houses ^{with} ~~to~~ the sewage flowing, from a ruptured pipe, through this main avenue. Thinking it ironic that a place where rich people (*païse walle*) live should be filthy and untraversable, this glaring contrast drew my attention to the construction of these houses and their surrounds. The presence of what these people attempt to escape made it all the more clear what it was that these houses were about.

Marc Girouard, in his 'Cities and People', cites a satirical poem by William Cowper of 1781, some ten years after the establishment of suburbs in Calcutta (Silverstone 1994: 57-8). It captures the isolation, and escapism from overcrowded areas, that underlies life in the suburbs.

Suburban villas, highway-side retreats,
That dread the encroachment of our growing streets,
Tight boxes neatly sash'd, and in a blaze
With all a July sun's collected rays
Delight the citizen, who, gasping there
Breath clouds of dust, and calls it country air.

Houses in this, and other colonies, have an aesthetic quality that differs from those in the old city. Their designs are phantastic, a rhapsody on borrowed styles and imported motifs, often using non-local materials. Typically they have walled gardens and solid wrought iron fences; some employ gatemen (*chowkidars*) to filter out callers (anthropologists) and enhance security. It was the gardens that struck this first-time visitor. Gardening is enjoyed by many; or, at least, growing some flowers in a pot is a popular pastime. The large number of 'garden centres' on the outskirts of the city is testament to that. Yet the gardens in this, and other colonies, are highly manicured - lush groomed lawns, a rare sight in urban India, are tended by small fleets of gardeners. One area of the colony has a shared garden in the corner: a private playground for residents' children.

Late on into fieldwork, the lengths to which families, "that dread the encroachment of ever growing roads", had gone in creating their own spaces became apparent.

The new Municipal chief declared an *atikraman hatao abhiyan*¹¹ (anti-encroachment campaign). This affected all; street vendors, makeshift tea stalls and residents of this (and other) colonies were all ordered to clear the streets of encroaching structures. The campaign moved inexorably, day by day, to each and every area of the city. Ten days into the campaign, residents of Ravindrapuri colony were to be seen on the local Siti Cable news (*Siti Halchal*) complaining as they reluctantly ordered their staff to tear down their encroachment on to public space. It then became clear how these residents had made part of the city (privately) their own.

Many of the Ravindrapuri households have cars but as the vignette above suggested beyond saving a family from wading through raw sewage the possible set of journeys is small. Some old city residents, more at home in their narrow alleys, laughed at the wasteful extravagance of cars in a city with notoriously few and poor quality roads¹². Perhaps they might consider visiting the 'Country Retreat' that advertising hoardings signalled the imminent establishment of in the far north east of the city? A real escape from the pressures of the city.

The gates, gardens and guardsmen all serve to project an image of and maintain seclusion, privacy and isolation and this is something only the rich can afford. Yet the houses are curiously open in the sense that they take seriously the task of projection and are centred on their façade. There is therefore a contrast between houses described in the old city whose central, lit courtyard is both interior and yet exteriorising (and a 'traditional' feature of Hindu architecture). In their architectural style such houses give little away to the passer-by, yet their inhabitants 'open them up' through their interactions. Colony houses work in an opposite manner. Designed 'for show' they actually reveal little and daily practice does little to open them up any further.

¹¹The local press in this period was saturated by articles and pictures of the campaign. The interest, amusement and anger that this 'clean up' precipitated was evidenced all over the city, especially in the tea shops (cf. *Aaj*, *Dainik Jagran* and *Gandive* in November and December 1997). An overview of this campaign, and a related discussion of public and private space, can be found in chapter 5.

¹² Kumar notes that in 1958 there were 60 miles of roads as compared with over 300 miles of alleys (1988: 77).

The other contrast, and one that was frequently noted by friends in places like Kali's tea shop, brings us back to Bayly's comment on municipal pride and the state of buildings in this and other north Indian cities. Bayly notes that the British misunderstood the run-down appearance of housing, thinking that their inhabitants cared little for their home and surroundings¹³. What this suggests, apart from a familiar colonial ethnocentrism, is that a different evaluation of the importance of outward appearance might be at work. Many old city inhabitants, and the more reflexive colony dwellers, were apt to remind me that the important things in life lay 'within', and not in appearance. Proverbially, the rich Banarsi merchant from Chowk travels second class, with an old suitcase and worn bedroll. This is not interpreted as parsimony, but a matter of correct priorities. It is only, for those that recount this and other commonplaces, the brash *nouveaux riches* of the colonies and those enraptured by a culture of conspicuous display that seek to show (*dekhana*, causative of see) their wealth. The distinction is between exterior (show) and interior (values). The same can be said of the houses, which in the colonies are faced in marble and expensive fittings and in the old city where, whatever the wealth of their inhabitants, there is a striking equality of appearance.

Thus far, through a description of the two principal forms of housing present in Varanasi, I have suggested a quite stark sense of discontinuity between these areas. In a purely physical sense such an opposition appears well-founded. But now it remains to ask, in more detail, what residents of both these areas consider the primary differences between these areas to be. I propose that this be approached through an evaluation of the term 'suburb', a term that will aid us in thinking through some of the 'dislocated' and 'located' senses of culture that are suggested when residents from one locale talk about residents in the other.

¹³ Appendix 1, a letter to the press which notes the huge number of millionaires in Varanasi who do little to care for crumbling temples, mirrors the British perspective discussed by Bayly.

The suburbs in Varanasi

Around Varanasi shopping malls are being constructed in which boutiques with Italian marble floors sell the latest in fashion. Fleets of Mercedes, Marutis, Contessas, Esteems, and Fiats disgorge their well-dressed passengers into the crowded streets and doormen admit them into these cathedrals of consumption. Outside, the walls are Coca-colonised or Pepsified as the soft-drink giants seek to imprint their logos on every available space. Banners spread across the streets announce 'seasonal offers' for colour televisions, fridges or announce the arrival of another soft furnishing shop in the city.

A new and 'exclusive' Videocon showroom opens, an Aladdin's cave of consumer durables. Beauty parlours ('Ladies Only') operate all over town, promising results that will 'surprise and please your husband'. The Nike 'swoosh' does just that as men race around the city on their Hero Honda motorbikes. Dinner parties turn into impromptu pitches for home-care products and pyramid-marketing techniques. Hoardings at the cross-roads announce the launch of 'inexpensive' cellular networks: "So feel free to spread the word". The local television channels proclaim the Varanasi branch of Benneton open, while graffiti exhorts Indians to reject the West and adopt *swadeshi* (home industry) products (and mentalities). At the news stands, the first issue of Indian Cosmopolitan goes on sale, and its advertisers ask, teasingly, "Are you up to it?"

There are no shady forests and groves in this landscape and some may protest that the contrast I have drawn is rather stark. There is no mention of the Ganga and the *ghats* in this portrait of a city, no cows, *pan* chewing and rubbish, rather the messages of desire, domesticity and consumerism. But it is this contrast that surfaced continually during my stay in the city. A short journey through the city, by bike or foot, will present the traveller with just such a landscape of difference; from old city to spacious suburb, from religious to consumer activity. Of course commerce and religion have long been partners in Varanasi, the two coexist and support each other. However, what was presented to me during the course of fieldwork was entirely different evaluations of these landscapes and the forms of activity they

support or encourage, and these evaluations reached their clearest expression when people talked about 'living' and homes. In such statements what emerged repeatedly was a division between the old city and the colonies. I now want to think in more detail about 'suburbs', less in terms of geography and more in terms of the social and cultural existence they are seen to support. One place to start is a geographical account of the city in the 1950s.

Singh, the first post-independence geographer of the city, represented Varanasi in terms of three zones. The outer zone is where "an air of modernity and change is encountered, and characterised by open spaces and 'good residential housing'" (1955: 48). These areas then are the suburbs of the 1950s; the British colonial reaches of the city, the Cantonment, Civil Lines and BHU, the creation of nationalists and reformers in the early twentieth century. Clearly this is a rather limited definition of suburb and one that, not unreasonably, pays little attention to the people who live within them.

What dangers are there then in ascribing to a residential area like Ravindrapuri colony, just one block from the main Assi-Godaulia road, the epithet 'suburb'? On the face of it many, especially if we treat the category suburb as a primarily geographical one, defined as 'contrapositional' (Archer 1997) to the main urban settlement. However, since the first suburbs were in Calcutta, in an area hardly marginal to the city proper, we might want to establish a sense of the word freed from purely geographical position. If we examine the historical and cultural conditions under which the term arose it becomes clear that suburbs refer to more than mere geographical location.

Both Calcutta and Madras figure heavily in the pre-history of suburbia (Silverstone 1994,1997; Archer 1997; King 1980), reminding us that the application of this term to contemporary South Asia is not the totally misplaced imposition of foreign terminology that it may at first appear. In form and function, suburbs derive from their colonial beginnings. However, the term carries with it a considerable amount of cultural baggage which must be discussed.

The early uses of the term suburb in English refer to the areas outside the centre of the city: suburb was used in a pejorative sense to refer to these areas as sites of licentiousness, impropriety and ill-discipline. By the eighteenth century, a reversal of this original meaning had occurred (Archer 1997: 29) and so, in South Asia, the suburb became the spacious, orderly area, where the task of government was discharged and where those responsible for it could reside. The confluence of ideas about architecture with those of race and disease (King 1980:12), and the representational imperatives of authority and government, resulted in the Cantonment areas of cities in which there was a British presence. The geographical discreteness reflected the paradoxical nature of the Raj; attempting control of, but remaining aloof from, its subjects.

With this reversal of the meaning of the suburbs in cities like London, linked to demographic and economic changes, came a rethinking of the nature of leisure; places of work and leisure became distinct. The suburbs became the inverse of the hub - sites of inactivity, lack of productivity. Archer concludes that this was not just a matter of taste, or of geographical dispersions based on economics and organised transport, but predicated on a change of consciousness which anchored identity in the "autonomous *self* rather than in a social...collective" (Archer 1997: 41, original emphasis). With the inversion of the meaning of suburb such areas grew both as a product of, and an escape from, the expanding cities. In the process, suburbs became areas with claims to physical distance, social distinction and cultural control (Silverstone 1997: 5). It was the city centres that now stood for what the suburbs had previously represented: areas of licentiousness and ill-discipline.

Rather than transpose this western development to contemporary Varanasi, and invoke the 'curtain twitching' that so often accompanies references to the suburb, it is possible to draw, after Silverstone (1994), on Strathern's discussion of the suburb (1993). Her argument helps avoid an either (urban) or (rural) distinction in categorising the suburb, returning to it a neither/nor hybridity in which it is essentially the product of the intertwinement of categories. In this light, the suburb can represent the fundamental ambiguities between collectivity and individuality, community and family, and cultural production and consumption, that people drew

my attention to with their representations of people according to their geographical location in the city.

The Agrawal family had been living for two months in Shivam apartments when I first spoke with them. The block is itself a good example of the changing patterns of land use and the implications of this for cultural practice. The 'Shivam talkies' (a cinema) had been replaced by the four blocks of flats that are home to about 40 families. The Agrawals bought two flats and, by knocking them into one, created a huge living area. No attention to detail had been spared in creating what reminded me of a set from a Bombay tele-serial. The family had moved away from a *mohalla* near Chowk, the centre of the old city, where commerce meets important religious areas, labourers wait to find employment, and bodies make their way to Manikarnika. It is an area that for Banarsis typifies the glorious chaos and spirit of Shiva's city.

For the Agrawals, the need for a different sort of space was a primary motivation for a move across the city; from crowded, dirty alleys to an apartment block in the spacious south. The traffic jams that continually threaten to bring Chowk to a standstill do not occur on the wide road that passes Shivam complex. Shopping is easier in this part of town. Stores here are fixed price and offer a huge array of luxury household goods and imported foodstuffs. Their children are educated at the English medium St John's School and this is much more easily accessible from the south of the city. The most telling observation centred around children and their upbringing. Recalling Chowk it was said that "the neighbours there are not that good, they are mainly *Ahirs*". A reference to an important caste grouping of eastern Uttar Pradesh, the cow-herding and milk-selling Ahirs (or Yadavs as they prefer to be known) is noteworthy because this caste group in some sense stands for 'old' Varanasi and the ways of its residents¹⁴. This move and all its motivations therefore appears to be a denial of typically Banarsi ways and pleasures. The move away from the 'filthy' and crowded *gullis* to the newly renovated flat in the low density housing of the

¹⁴ Kumar (1988: 232-3) makes a similar point, i.e., that castes such as the Ahirs, whose professions had undergone little structural change during the period of her study (1880-1986), are the strongest bastions of the traditional lifestyle.

suburbs was quite specifically linked the nature of the people in Chowk, the heart of the old city. Moving house, in this respect, is about more than just finding somewhere, anywhere to live.

One way to fix identities is to view them in terms of ideas of place that are maplike and motionless (Ossman 1994: 67).

In depicting fundamental difference in architectural and cultural practice between the old city and the suburbs I risk, as Ossman warns, fixing the identities of those that live in these two different areas. However, I would argue that there are two grounds for taking such an approach. One is, quite simply, the repeated and powerful contrasts that colony dwellers and old city residents drew between each other. The other, following Alter (1993b), is that one way of approaching the disjunctions between the 'traditional' and 'modern' in Varanasi is to see both as playing or projecting against each other, sometimes in quite conscious ways.

It was when a well respected member of Kali's tea shop said that the influence of the colony *wallahs* on Banarsi culture was as malevolent as that of foreign television that I realised that, to him at least, something quite important was at stake. His point was that they produced nothing in the city, and here he was referring to cultural production. Not only do they not organise community events, he argued, they fail to attend those elsewhere in the city. He added, later, that they were happy to watch such events, or something else, on television. This comment reflects one aspect of the historical development of suburbs in that they are sites of inactivity and lack of productivity; for this trenchant critic the sense was that the people do nothing but make money and remain in their houses ('to count it'). In an echo of Archer's comment about "autonomous *self* rather than ... social...collective" he suggested that "they have no connection with anyone else" (*kisi se koi matlab nahi hai*), they are aloof and consider themselves superior; above the life of the old city and its 'backward', implacably traditional residents.

Many in the old city felt that colony *wallahs* were divorced from the real city, more interested in the ephemera of fashion and the latest three-piece suites than other, more simple pleasures. Some families in the colonies I visited seemed aware of this reputation and attempted to construct distance between themselves and their neighbours or make a particular point about being Banarsi. And this is what Alter's (1993b) piece is driving at: that those who see themselves as 'old timers' quite consciously use the 'Banarsi' label, and the cultural practice which accompanies it, as tools for the assertion of difference. In this context it should be noted that this cultural reference is given spatial expression; cultural difference is asserted through geographical location

What all this suggests is that the physical landscape of the city is used to map identities at a time when the nature of culture, between what is and what should be, is highly contested. Seen in the context of liberalisation, and what is characterised as a 'hunger' (*bukh*) for status symbols and objects, the stark disjunctions across the landscape of the city can be employed quite easily, if with some degree of parody, to locate the 'other' and therefore the self. This is not to argue that the culture of Varanasi has always been unitary, indeed one argument of Kumar (1988) is that, in the 1920s and 1930s, a pan-Banarsi culture in which both rich and poor participated began to wane. I would suggest that this process may be gathering pace (or simply becoming more discernible.) What people were asserting is that the landscape of Varanasi is one highly tangible resource through which the social identities of residents in the city can be fixed.

Geography here emerges as a constituting feature of culture and identity: a hook onto which to hang understandings of the city and its peoples. This social geography is presented here in rather stark contrast and there are considerable dangers in so doing. Those who made such comments, from either side of this purported divide, were not stating a social-geographic rule ("that the roads must be red if they correspond to red lines on a map" (Ziff, cited in Bourdieu 1977: 29)) but employing a mnemonic for representing themselves and others. There are residents of the 'old city' who might be as divorced from the spirit of the city as any colony *wallah*. Similarly, colony *wallahs* who are enthusiastic participants in what 'old city' residents

call proper (*sahī*) Banarsi culture: trips on boats, drinking *thundai* laced with *bhang* (edible cannabis) and all-night, open-air music concerts.

The nature of the buildings recently constructed in the city, apart from that already described, would seem to fit into a narrative of suburbanisation. During fieldwork, the twenty storey commercial-housing *Kashiraj* complex, on land belonging to the Maharaja of Banaras, and in which he has retained a stake, was being constructed: evidence of the growing paucity of space, the increasing land prices this results in, and a different modality of consumerism from that evinced elsewhere in the city. This pattern of contemporary development is replicated throughout areas of the city with which I am familiar. Close to Shivala, off the Assi-Godualia road the *Guru Kripa* 'residential-cum-shopping complex' is under construction. In Assi, near the Abhay talkies, another defunct cinema has been pulled down and foundations sunk for an apartment block. At Rath Yatra crossing the vast *Kuber* shopping centre and office complex has arisen. Well manicured lawns and smart railings were in evidence long before any shops opened¹⁵. By the busy Durga Kund temple another shopping complex, *Dayal Towers*, is being developed and its billboard suggests it will be similar in conception if not size.

It is with such developments in mind that the more familiar meaning of suburban is of some use, primarily because it draws attention to the centrality of the home and domesticity in the suburb, and of the consumption implicit in these ideas. These will be discussed in more detail below, for now it suffices to note that in such commercial or residential developments, the consumerism so instrumental to suburbia, and so implicated with the development of both local and global television, finds stylistically appropriate outlets.

¹⁵ The Kuber complex was opened in late 1998. It features, over its two acre site, escalators, four lifts, central air-conditioning, generators, "the potential of thousands of customers coming and going daily", car and scooter parking. In December 1998, the Raymond suiting and menswear chain opened a shop in the complex. Much was made of its mosaic *Italian* marble flooring.



Plate 3: 5. The *Kashi Raj Commercial-cum-Residential Complex*, Bhelupura.



Plate 3: 6. The *Kuber Complex*, Rath Yatra.

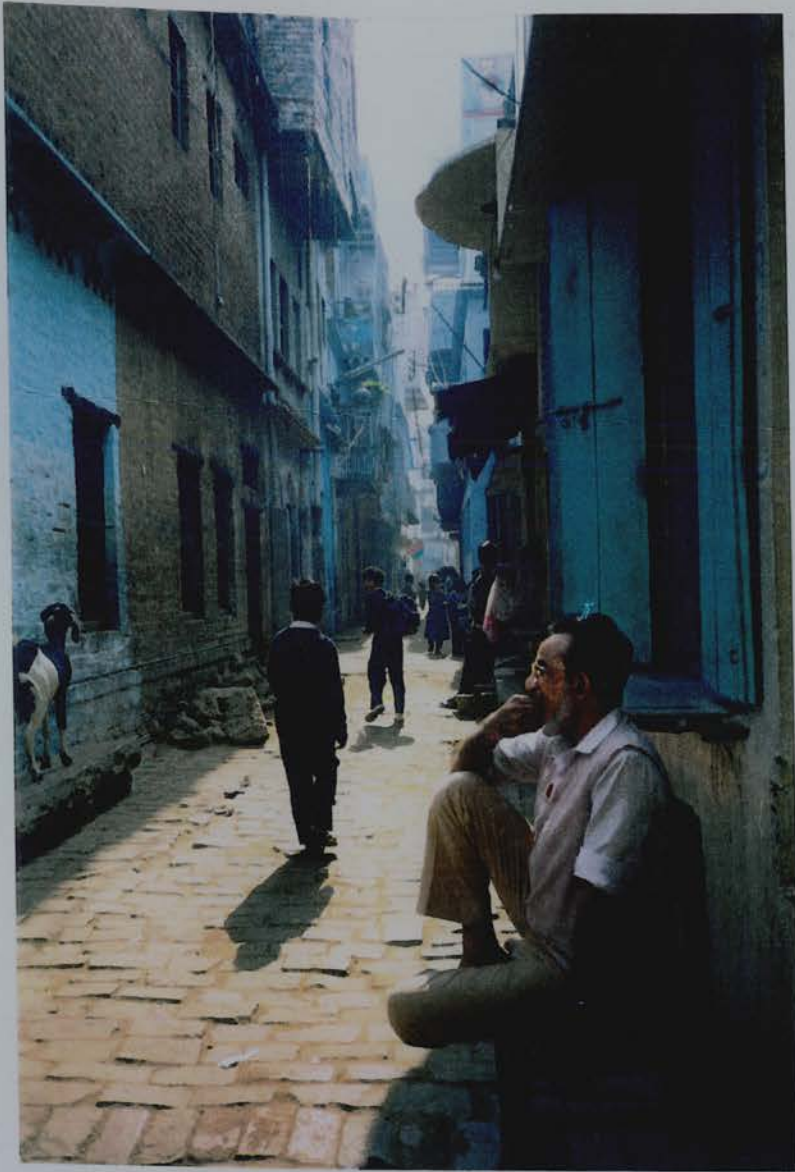


Plate 3: 7. 'Old city': Shivala.

In some respects the term 'suburban' fits quite neatly into an account of the landscape of contemporary Varanasi, in others it might be quite reasonably suggested that a city devoid^{of} 'lace curtain-twitchers' is best not discussed in terms of suburbs. Perhaps one indication that it may be a valid way in which to think about such cultural and spatial changes is the hesitation felt in using it. The suburb (in this context and western contexts) is a concept which evokes either fear or comfort. From the vantage point of Kali's tea shop - fear; from behind the walls of the barricaded house - comfort. It is a category which, viewed from either direction, contains a sense of distrust. The colonisers of Varanasi, who prepare the ground for suburban dwellings are oddly reminiscent of those pioneers Girouard refers to who built

built terraces of housing, often isolated in fields “waiting for London to catch up with it” (1985: 276).

However, in other respects, as Kaviraj (1996) and Khilnani (1997) remind us, Varanasi is most clearly labelled as a traditional pilgrimage centre of sacred spaces and very different from Calcutta and Madras, not to mention London, in its historical development and contemporary nature. The term suburban, however deconstructed and localised it may be, has a resonance rather at odds with the defining ethos of Varanasi.

Conclusions

From an orientating geography for the newly arrived visitor, this chapter has proceeded to consider some spatial and geographical change in the contemporary city. From the many names available I chose to highlight *Anandavan*, the forest of bliss, to mark the progression of the city, from a densely forested area to one in which apartment blocks rise out of the remains of cinemas, which themselves had been constructed on once open space.

Given that the history and cultural life of Varanasi have been written about from a range of perspectives it seems valuable to risk a novel transposition of terminology. As I have indicated, this is not without dangers. However, there has been, to date, no literature dedicated to the forms of geographical and social development that I have highlighted and these are crucial for understanding the contexts of contemporary urban life in India. Certainly Varanasi has, as residents (in all locales) are apt to note, a unique place in the cultural geography of India, but although it may be a city *sui generis* some developments are more widespread in urban India. Some framework for understanding their implications is therefore required.

By invoking a cartographic metaphor, and by highlighting the importance of place and space in culture, the ground has been prepared to consider more completely the relation between culture and the space that it inhabits. In an era of globalisation,

the images that are used, academically and popularly, to explain the impact of these more wide-ranging cultural flows are very often geographic. The world, it is said, has become a smaller place, by which it is often meant that geographic boundaries no longer represent cultural boundaries. (Which is not to say that the extent to which the world was ever split into discrete cultural units has not been questioned.)

There is therefore a double-layered narrative unfolding. At one level we are considering a very located sense of culture. 'Located' here suggests that culture inhabits a space that is at once socially, geographically and historically determined. By subjecting space in the city of Varanasi to a broad historical examination it is possible to suggest that the 'homogeneous' culture of the city is not so clearly shared and is heavily contingent on its relationship with space. By highlighting physical and social differences between the suburbs (as a geographical reality and a 'structure of feeling') and the old city I sought to show how the "changing physical layout of the city...in itself provides important evidence for the changing urban structure of community" (Freitag 1989b: 111).

At another level, by invoking a strong sense of the word 'place', the ground is prepared for an analysis of the impact of media technologies on senses of place (Meyrowitz 1985). Kailashnath Pandey, a trenchant social critic and frequent writer to the local press, complained to me that young men think about America and 'the West', and they talk about these places, "as if they have been there", when in reality they have never even been to Allahabad (4-5 hours by bus). There is, therefore, a potential tension between writing of culture in Varanasi as inhabiting space and place in quite fundamental ways and adopting the position that media tend towards a deterritorialisation of culture. However, it is this tension, or contradiction, which is at the heart of the cultural process I am seeking to illuminate.

There are those who seek to hang onto the very located sense of identity that involvement in neighbourhood practice (festivities, protests and gossip etc.) engenders for residents of Varanasi. There are others whose cultural moorings seem more deterritorialised by the new media regimes. It is the tension between these

located and dislocated senses of culture that lies at the heart of experiences of modernity in Varanasi.

By employing the representations of residents from both types of 'locale' in the city, and mapping them onto a social and geographical account, I have attempted to illustrate the 'structure of feeling' that pervades, or is seen to pervade, these locales. To the colony *wallahs*, the old city and its residents are 'located' in ways in which they are not. The colony *wallahs* may have been abroad, or further from Varanasi than the old city residents but as far as the old city residents are concerned, they do nothing but watch television and emulate what they see on it, and wish to go to the places they discover on the screen. Their moorings are less closely secured to the city, and their houses (or apartment blocks) which conform to a transnational repertoire of styles and display little continuity with the 'place' in which they are located, represent this placelessness most keenly. Colony *wallahs* are apt to regard their transcendence of 'place' as modern and sophisticated while old city residents see it as a denial of 'place'. That the 'place' is Varanasi, the city which to them epitomises the strength, vitality and brilliance of India, makes this disavowal of its ways such a live element in the ways people account for change in the city.

The old city folk, as colony *wallahs* and many old city residents themselves would have it, are content with where they are and feel no need to ape the cultures seen on television. They are happy to be in the city which in itself is an entire world, albeit one whose moorings are those of mythology. As far as they are concerned, those who look further afield, wishing for other lives in other places in the company of their television set are rudderless. Located, in the sense that colony *wallahs* might consider these types of people to be, comes to mean backward, and has a temporal aspect too: implacably attached to the past. It is in this sense that 'place', in a geographical and televisual sense, assumes the importance it does in mapping competing experiences of modernity in Varanasi.

The following chapters will continue to illustrate and examine these themes by outlining some patterns of media use in the city and examine in more detail this relationship between place and culture in a localised way.

CHAPTER FOUR

Footprints in the *mohalla*: the social organisation of mass media in Varanasi

The sky was thick with TV. If you wore special glasses you could see them spinning through the sky... (Arundhati Roy).

Introduction

This predominantly ethnographic chapter is intended to provide readers with an historical and contemporary overview of cable operators and satellite television¹ in Varanasi. It is based on my investigations into modes of service provision by neighbourhood operators and the two programme producing networks in Varanasi. It explains how programmes transmitted from outside India find their way into the homes of Varanasi via satellites, Indian media companies and neighbourhood operators. It considers some of the issues and conflicts involved in these transnational and local processes and by so doing charts the complementary and contradictory relationship between television and other media in the city. In this respect I have focused on cinema and newspapers and by doing so provide a background for understanding domestic television culture and its relationship with extant media in Varanasi.

As a prelude to later chapters I offer an account of media organisation in the city which stresses the apparent seamlessness between media and life in the city, and between different media. In common with my general approach to television, I argue that this medium can only be understood, particularly when it is local *and* non-local, by attention to the entire media space of which it is a constituent part. Particular importance is attached to the two main satellite networks in the city, Siti

¹ Throughout this chapter, and beyond, I refer to cable operators and satellite television. This follows, on the whole, local usage. It also points out the fact that operators who formerly owned and used their own satellite dishes are now served by a central provider. They are therefore properly called cable operators.

Cable and Creative TV (CTV) who provide non-local and their own highly localised channels. Their arrival (in 1994-5) not only consolidated the organisation of existing satellite services in Varanasi, but also signalled, through local programming, a considerable expansion to the media environment of the city.

The investigations into the provision of satellite television were, by their very nature, probes into commercial undertakings. There is considerable conflict and distrust between individual participants in these industries, e.g., between the government and cable operators, and my progress in developing a rounded picture was often hampered, quite reasonably, by individuals uncertain as to my intentions. Therefore, the nature of this topic limited what information people were happy to provide to me, *and* restricts what can be described here. The driving force of television is money, and it should be of little surprise that those involved in the industry should be concerned to protect their commercial interests. As we shall see, the cable operators of Varanasi live with uncertainty, and interference from outside agencies and competitors. The inquisitions of a foreign anthropologist were not always welcomed although this suspicion, it seemed to me, was often founded on disbelief that someone would come to Varanasi to study something as mundane as satellite television provision.

Cable *wallahs* and the local supply of a global commodity

The arrival of satellite television was more anonymous than the expansion of the DD network. The pomp and curiosity accompanying the introduction of television to Varanasi arose from the part Indira Gandhi played in the television expansion campaign and from her assassination. There was no highly publicised tour of India by national leaders to herald the advent of satellite television, and it is reasonable to assume that 'footprints' trod on the *mohallas* below long before most realised what was going on. To all but the very well informed, the names of global and Indian media moguls remain unknown.

However, some local individuals were ahead of the game and those involved at an early stage were active in Varanasi towards the end of 1991. They were enterprising individuals who employed a small amount of capital and technological know-how to piece together a small network among the houses in their neighbourhood. Often this network was no more extensive than 10-15 nearby households and offered films on a single video channel. These proto-networks were often extensions of private video halls (in which small groups of paying spectators watched films laid on for them), or provided a very limited range of English language channels to more affluent households in the colonies.

In other neighbourhoods, a handful of channels were being offered from the first satellite dishes of the city. With networks established, investments were made to extend the number of households served and channels offered. Growth seems to have been very slow in the early stages because technical knowledge was at a premium and hardware, such as modulators (which pick out and prepare the signal of each channel for amplification), was prohibitively priced. However, by late 1992-3, these small networks were beginning to grow in size and number and the city landscape, replete with circular aerials since 1984, was slowly becoming marked by the much larger, and usually home-made, satellite dishes. By October 1992, the local papers were listing the channels available on satellite services: Star Plus (with no Indian programming), BBC, Prime Sports and MTV and the newly launched Zee TV. The private networks that delivered these channels began to grow in size as the service became more popular (and plentiful), which was contingent on the processes of acceptance and negotiation by the families which form the focus of this thesis.

The narrow alleys of Varanasi are heavily congested both at ground level and above. Threaded between electricity poles, telephone cables, and other aerial obstacles lie the discarded remnants of kites abandoned by disappointed children. It is through this *mélange* that the job of connecting houses to the burgeoning cable network is conducted. Outside most cable operation rooms lies a bamboo ladder and, in addition to a reel of cable and a few hand tools, little else is required to relieve viewers of what many represent as the monotony of Doordarshan. Operators look on as their more nimble assistants thread the cable through the obstacles above,

connecting every 100 yards to a signal amplifier before the destination is reached. A one-off charge is made for the initial connection (Rs. c.250), which covers the cost of the cable. Hereafter average charges per household connection are in the region of Rs 100 per month, for which households can expect to receive about 30 channels. Once the television is hooked up, the party returns to base to tweak the signal until all are happy. One more household and its set is connected to the possibilities of satellite television.

At the control room a cable operator or his workers will staff the office for at least twelve hours a day, some workers being supplied with mattresses for the all night shifts that important cricket matches necessitate. Complaint taking is the primary job and pagers or telephones a necessary adjunct for the task. One operator noted that the speed of complaints has risen since his involvement, indicative in his opinion of the addiction to television that has gripped households, particularly those of *khelpremis*, sports fans. Many complaints require a home visit or a trip to the *gullis* (alleys) to locate a stolen length of cable or an illicit connection; both of which adversely affect the signal strength and hence the picture quality.

Although the profession has the appearance of one which requires technical expertise, I found no operators with any formal training. The operators come from a range of backgrounds: computer and carpet salesmen, law graduate, owner of now-defunct video hall, and video cameraman are a few examples. Some had a natural inclination towards the profession by virtue of their previous jobs, while many saw running a service as no more than a stopgap before finding government service (*naukri*). The comments of Rajiv, who had advanced through a series of related businesses, provide an example of a typical career trajectory:

When I was young I was mad for the cinema, always wanted to hear songs and watch films. My father worried, thinking that I would become an *awaara* (vagrant or wanderer). I would always sit at local tape shops and with repairmen. I wanted to hear music all the time. I borrowed Rs. 5000 and with another man set up an [audio] tape library. Then I became interested in video cameras and managed to get hold of one, I trained myself in the house, made films of us all and then of weddings. I bought some video films too and had a video cassette player (VCP) and I hired that out...but then people started

buying them. Then cable came...we had a few channels and few customers and then I got a loan from the bank...

This account reflects the shifting trends in mass media and entertainment over the course of Rajiv's career. He was a participant in the cassette revolution from the late 1970s onwards (cf. Manuel 1993) and was quick to see the potential of video as home entertainment, and of the video camera as an important guest at any wedding. Rajiv, like most cable operators, moved with the times and the predilections of his neighbourhood clientele. It is pioneers such as Rajiv who have been responsible for the meteoric uptake of satellite television in Indian homes.

The hallmark of these small neighbourhood networks was the striking degree of participation by subscribers in their operation. Requests could be made for particular Hindi films to be shown on the 'video channel', and complaints and suggestions easily offered in the nearby control room. With operators providing services to *mohallas* in which they had grown up, there was a developed awareness of what customers wanted and what films were acceptable. Linguistic and regional concerns were made explicit in the channels selected and films aired. During Ramadan, my operator in Shivala moved Pakistan TV up in the sequence of channels, displacing the TNT/Cartoon Network, allowing Muslims without cable-ready televisions to view these topical programmes. Operators maintained close links by frequent house calls; some deliver sweets during *Diwali*, others display a relaxed attitude to overdue payments or allow old friends a discount. Some were quick to follow up problems or provide connections seasonally (i.e. during school holidays or cricket series).

Rajiv used the devotional videos of Gulshan Kumar², a fruit juice vendor turned media magnate, as an example of the flexibility inherent in a localised network. He had recognised the demand for these religious videos by older household members in

² Gulshan Kumar is an icon of the cassette and television culture that swept India during the 1980s and 1990s. His violent murder, in 1997, was testament to the highly competitive nature of the tape and television industry, and indicative of the 'threat' to their interests that major corporations feel private entrepreneurs represent. This conflict between individuals and corporations is a marked feature of the satellite television industry throughout the towns and cities of India. See below.

the morning and their calls for old films in the evening. His video channel provided both and, he claimed, thereby placated the more trenchant household critics of satellite television. Nowadays Rajiv is visited by the Indian representatives of global media groups such as Star, ESPN and TNT who come to negotiate deals for the provision of their channels. He broadcasts 17 channels, including the additional video channel for religious or other topical videos, to about 350 households. In a cupboard, as a memento of his entrepreneurial youth, he stores the audio cassette library with which he began his business.

On his roof top, as elsewhere across the city, home-made satellite dishes are highly visible. However, Rajiv's are unusual in that they are still functional. To understand the contemporary cable scene in Varanasi, it is necessary to appreciate the movement away from small, private operations towards one in which an arm of Zee television (and therefore Rupert Murdoch) is increasingly involved. This development marks a shift away from private capital investment by individual operators and towards the involvement of regional and global capitalists in the provision of satellite and cable services. By mid 1996, apart from Rajiv, whose satellite network remains his own, practically all the cable operators in the city were linked to Siti Cable.

Siti Cable and Creative TV: the 'local tv concept'

Siti Cable, the largest cable television network in India has invaded the local as well as the national market through its excellent signal quality, coverage of exciting local events and the finest entertainment through city specific programmes...coverage that's not international, national or regional but intimately local. Neighbourhood happenings. News. *Tamashas* (shows). Local events³.

Siti Cable operates in 43 cities across India (serving 4.5 million homes), including Noida, Kanpur and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. (Expansion to Lucknow and Allahabad was planned for 1998.) Siti Cable began services in Varanasi in February 1996 having persuaded, by various means, what were then properly called satellite

³ Promotional brochure of the Essel Group of Companies. This group also owns Zee, Zee Cinema and EL TV (renamed Zee India TV in Jan. 1998).

operators to join their provision service. A large proportion of their Rs. 250 million investment was spent linking the neighbourhood operators to their studio and broadcasting centre in Kabir Chaura⁴. It is clear that not all were quick to see the business or financial advantages that this merger would entail. Where an operator already enjoyed a competitive advantage over others in the locality the benefits of joining were minimal. However, in time, nearly all *satellite wallahs* became *cable wallahs*, merely amplifying the signal they received from Siti Cable and maintaining the maze of cables above the streets and alleys of their *mohalla*.

To date Siti Cable covers 129 *mohallas* and colonies throughout Varanasi which represents a considerable proportion of the areas covered by the erstwhile independents. According to the management, 50,000 households are connected through them, which they equate with some 250,000 viewers throughout the city. Siti Cable uses a figure of five per household in their calculations, which might represent a slight underestimate, and it could be said that they provide services to 350,000-400,000. Certainly if the networks of those operators who have resisted collaboration with Siti Cable are included, this larger figure seems entirely reasonable for Varanasi as a whole. However, the politics of numbers is distinctly Machiavellian because the pressures under which all parties work mean that few are willing to divulge the number of households they serve. Therefore, any estimate as to the number of cable connections in the city must be approached with care.

Siti Cable has consolidated the satellite industry in the city and standardised the price, quality and quantity of services. However, what is more pertinent to my account is that, in addition to the provision of the standard 32 channel package, Siti Cable also runs a local channel. They produce and commission programmes for this Siti Channel, as well as actively sponsoring new style events which are telecast live to homes around the city. Since, prior to the emergence of Siti Cable on the scene,

⁴ Throughout India, Siti Cable have^s connected their city transmission and broadcasting centres to cable operators with over 8000 km of cable. They are aware that this cable can be used for two way transmission and that this infrastructure will provide a foundation from which to launch their 'forthcoming' Internet business, and in the future, telephone services.

households were receiving satellite this development is altogether more significant. The implications of this are discussed below and in the following chapter.

If all this suggests that Siti Cable has a total hegemony over television services in the city it should be added that besides Rajiv's network, and a small clique of private operators determined to hold out against the "bullying tactics" of Siti Cable, one further network provides satellite television to households. Creative TV (CTV), the first programme-producing outfit in the city, is another player in what might be represented as a 'media saturated' city. It is a similar operation to Siti Cable, although smaller and backed by more limited amounts of capital.

Predominantly staffed by the young and enthusiastic, CTV has an eye on expansion throughout the eastern belt of Uttar Pradesh (*purvanchal*) and to working for other international news-gathering organisations. At present their television service extends to Moghul Serai, Mirzapur, Jaunpur. Sultanpur is their next target. The manager talks of a cultural and televisual renaissance in Eastern UP, viewing the area around Varanasi as leader in this televisual resurgence and CTV as leading the way in Varanasi. Although unequivocally a commercial set up, social causes remain high on their agenda. Their reports are often controversial in nature informing viewers about police brutality, the failure of Municipal policy and environmental issues. Commissions have been carried out for NGOs (including a piece on child labour) and links are maintained with Amnesty International.

In the cramped studio and editing suite at the heart of the CTV offices, a cardboard cut out of the ghats at Varanasi is shuffled into position. Meanwhile, the young news reader, having changed out of her jeans and into a sari, receives her instructions for the news presentation. The lights spark into action and the cameras begin filming. Like their colleagues at Siti Channel, reporters at CTV have spent much of the day filming their 'visuals' around the city, while the presenter wrote the news with the aid of the local papers. The opening sequence begins with shots of the city and their nightly news show, *Parikrama* (lit. circumambulation), is underway.

Television for and of Varanasi

In the Siti Cable offices hangs a picture of Indira Gandhi, a reminder that it was this woman who brought television to the city and whose death so firmly fixed the two events in the minds of the populace. It also serves as a reminder that the media arm of the Indian state has been slow to react to the changes satellite has brought. A news report, in late 1997, stated that Doordarshan had finally finished construction work on their Varanasi studio, although enquiries about this in Delhi reached a blank⁵. What the politically-minded citizens of the city had been demanding in 1984 had become a reality. However, in the intervening years Siti (and CTV) had responded to these calls, establishing Siti Channel as a mean to 'showcase' local talent and nurture new exponents of the classical musical and artistic traditions for which Varanasi is famed.

The content of Siti Channel is varied with news, views and locally produced programming, in addition to the occasional events which the channel organises and telecasts live. As the manager noted, Siti is a "local based news, events, talent, information and people based channel whose mission is to report local events and happening, religious festivals and political meetings, inaugural and social gatherings, anything of interest in Varanasi". Other local programming is bought from CTV, whilst the staple of Siti channel, like so many others, is Hindi films and *filmi* shows. Additionally, during the morning 'Siti Text' offers travel information, commodity prices at the various wholesale markets in Varanasi, weather reports, advertisements and news headlines.

On a daily basis perhaps the most important programme is *Siti Halchal*⁶; the most popular of their productions and, according to advertising rates, their most lucrative. This a 'news based' programme (the title 'News' would require a government license) covering the daily events of the city. It is broadcast twice each evening and repeated

⁵ On a return visit to Varanasi at the end of 1998 the broadcasting centre had yet to open, although the staff had been recruited.

⁶ Halchal in popular talk means 'condition' but its semantic range extends from bustle, stir and commotion to confusion and anarchy. The variety in any single episode of Siti Halchal is suggestive of any of these connotations, especially the sense of busyness in the city.

every morning. On Sundays, an extended version is broadcast (Siti this Week) with a pick of main stories selected. High on the agenda of Siti Channel is the city's civic issues and social problems.

In many respects, the 'news' programmes of CTV and Siti Cable show little significant departure from the journalistic style of the local press in the city. Invitations to attend press conferences, seminars and cultural programmes are accepted by all journalists (print and television) and the commentary on Siti Halchal borrows heavily from what has been published elsewhere. The video cameramen from Siti Channel are issued with their instructions for the day and collate footage from events as they tour the city on motor scooters. These might be of high profile visits by political leaders like Kalyan Singh (BJP leader in UP) or more quotidian neighbourhood happenings, filming a procession or protest file past, a strike or activities in a temple or on the *ghats*. A news conference at the Press Club might offer a less visually stimulating item in the daily round up of events. A large religious festival or small *mohalla* celebration, a murder or a meeting of the Rotary club in the city: any, or all of these, may be included in the fifteen items shown each evening.

Religious festivals receive high levels of attention. Any noteworthy festival, from those domestic in orientation, such as *Rakhi bhandan*, to those involving neighbourhood temples and deities receive coverage. Large ceremonials such as *Moharram*, and those culminating in the immersion of statues (*pratima*) in the Ganga, are also granted coverage. Cameramen are particularly keen to capture the processional nature of such events, and, by standing atop a vacant rickshaw capture the movement of such processions as they beat a path through a locality.

In other ways the news programmes mark the progression of the secular and religious year. Independence Day (15th August) is celebrated with features on special activities at city schools, and Gandhi Jayanti (2nd October) with reports on seminars organised by disciples of the Mahatma. Towards the end of August, the news shows the markets of the city selling goods for the occasion of *Krishna Janmashtmi* with the comment that "according to the customs of the Hindu religion, people are buying those items they need to celebrate". A month later, and "on the occasion of



Plate 4: 1. Filming the Krishna *lila* (play) at Tulsi *ghat*, 3. xi. 97.

Dhan teras” people are shown buying stainless steel items around the city, with a particular focus on *Thatheri* bazaar, the metalwork market. Although Hindu festivals and activities dominate the life of the city, there is nothing to suggest that Muslim activities are given less preferential television coverage in proportion to their quantity.

Indeed, the involvement of CTV in the revitalisation of one city event offers further evidence that the city, and the activities of its all constituent communities, are treated with impartiality. The *Burha Mangal*, (cf. Kumar 1988: 126-31), has been resurrected due to the energy of CTV. This festival of music held on the *ghats* characterised the *mauz* and *masti* (abandonment and insouciance) of pan-Varanasi culture but had declined in the 1920’s: “Anyone who knows anything about Banaras knows that *the* symbol of the city is the *Burha Mangal*” (ibid.: 126). Attempts to re-establish this event are an indication that the local channels seek to represent both the diverse and unified traditions of Varanasi and, as their staff claim, they exist for the benefit of the entire city.

Crime constitutes a large proportion of the coverage on Siti and CTV’s news shows. An unexplained bomb explosion, the theft of thousands of saris, kidnappings and the poisoning of some Shivala residents, are just some that come to mind. The cameramen all have pagers and are able to move across the city rapidly in response to calls from telephone shops (PCOs) that act as stringers. The camera often arrives before the police.

Other output, on both local channels, is strongly centred on children and they figure prominently in quiz shows recorded at their studios (e.g. *Jet Antakshari*) and in the coverage given to schools and other events. Two further shows feature children: *Siti Gunganeye* (Hum of the Siti) presents children singing their favourite films songs, the other, aptly called *Phulwari bachchon ki*, Children’s flower garden, the talents and achievements of local children. The importance of a channel that has a strong editorial policy regarding children is especially significant given the high levels of concern voiced about the effect of television on children.

In summary, there are very few events that are not filmed, or few that people involved in them would not wish to be filmed. The role of narcissism (for lack of a less value-laden word) in city media should not be underplayed. Having watched events that were being filmed, it was always interesting to watch those who had participated in them watching themselves watching the event. Indeed, this was one of the main reasons cited for watching the local news at all - to catch a glimpse of oneself or a friend. When the news bulletin began we would expectantly listen to discover what items were being featured and then move closer to the television as each successive item brought the relevant one closer. A friend, relative or colleague caught on film increased the appreciation of the event. The use of "we" is intentional, because I was not immune from this narcissism. Following camera crews around the city and attending events which I suspected would involve Siti or CTV, I too became quite adept at appearing on the Siti screen.

Getting a seat on the dais in the televisual age ensures presence around the city and the mobility of one's name and credentials. In many ways the narcissistic tendencies of the visual media in Varanasi are an amplification of the self-publicity to which the print media give expression. However, whereas events given coverage in the press tend to stress the organisers and the administrative personnel, leaving participants to be described as 'the people', 'residents' or 'spectators', televisual coverage gives more attention to the participants and to their own voices.

In September 1997, towards the end of the rains, *Siti Halchal* ran a special report on neighbourhood problems and residents' responses to them. A feature on a protest in Shivala, organised in response to perceived inadequacies in cleaning, was followed by a piece that centred on the woes of Shivpur, a predominantly Muslim area. Pictures of sewage flowing down alleys and into houses and *karkhannas* (factories, in this case for weaving) were accompanied by the views of the residents themselves. Voices were raised and pleas made passionately. Residents implored the authorities to act. The article ended, poignantly, on the image of a woman sobbing into her *sari* making an impassioned appeal, directly into the camera. In terms of content, such news is commonplace. However, the voice that is given to those concerned marks a clear disjunction from the coverage given in the press, which is usually constructed in

a series of passive statements and, in a manner reminiscent of a 'Court and Social', devotes more space to listing those presiding than to what actually occurred.



हरिश्चन्द्र घाट पर सफाई की मांग को लेकर धरना देते हुए नागरिक (बायें) व बीच सड़क पर एकत्र कूड़ा (दायें)।

छाया : जागरण

जनसमस्याओं से क्षुब्ध नागरिकों ने ज़ोनल अधिकारी को बंधक बनाया

वाराणसी, 23 सितम्बर। नगर में व्याप्त उसी कूड़ा घर से होकर गुजरना पड़ रहा है। उन्होंने अधिकारी का कार्य देख रहे डा. धीरेश्वर चुतवेंदी को सफाई चौकी पर जाकर समुचित कार्रवाई करने जलजमाव, सीवर जाम, गंदगी से उबे नागरिक कहा कि कूड़े के दुर्गन्ध से आसपास के लोगों को

Plate 4: 2 "Towns people agitated by public problems tie-up the Zonal Official". The caption reads: At Harishchandra *ghat* citizens picket in protest against lack of cleaning; in the middle of the street nothing but rubbish. (*Dainik Jagran* 24. ix. 97)

This illustration, reporting on the *chakka jam* in Shivala, demonstrates the continuity between the local television news and the press in Varanasi. Countless other examples could be offered to suggest the interrelationship between the two media. Daily, the newspapers and local television report on demonstrations by formal or informal neighbourhood groups against the neglect of their *mohalla* by municipal agencies. This reflects the considerable attention given to city administration and politics in tea and *pan* shops. The three most publicly discussed of the municipal issues are those of *pani*, *bijli* and *safai*: water, electricity and cleaning. This trinity of issues, and the *dhamas*, *bhands*, *hartals*, *geraos* and *chakka jams*⁷ that they give rise to, are central in the presentation of the city by the local networks.

⁷ These are all varieties of protests available to activists. They are, respectively, pickets, closure, strikes, besieging an official (to press for demands) and the closure of a road passing through the area for which attention, or action is sought.

The following chapter will continue this discussion of local affairs and consider the impact of local television on this field of activity. However, some comment on the scale of the newspaper market and on the presence of radio in Varanasi is necessary to give a fuller picture of the media environment in the city. According to the Auxiliary Information Department in Sagra there are 12 daily, 34 weekly and 5 monthly papers in Varanasi registered with the state government⁸. There are five primary papers with editions published in the city, (circulation, where available, is given in brackets)⁹: in Hindi, *Dainik Jagran* (83,088), *Aaj* (120,982), *Swatantra Bharat* (90,517) *Hindustan Dainik* and the popular evening paper, *Gandive*. In addition *Nav Bharat Times* is available, although it is considered more highbrow, whilst there are two primary newspapers in Urdu, *Quami Morcha* and *Aawaz-e-Mulk*. In English, *The Times of India* (Lucknow and Delhi editions), *The Hindustan Times* (Lucknow) and *The Pioneer* (Varanasi) are all available, but have considerably smaller circulation than the Hindi dailies. Adding to these 'major' papers, are countless smaller papers covering a bewildering array of topics, ranging from cinema, the state lotteries, crime and artisanal issues to government employment¹⁰.

Forces of growth, change and regulation

Thus far I have examined the nature and scale of television programme provision and production in Varanasi. We have seen how Indira Gandhi's personalised DD expansion drive of the 1980s was overlaid by the more anonymous arrival of global television into India during the early 1990s. In the process, the nature of provision has changed: independent shoestring operators running extremely localised services were replaced by a controlled web of centrally-fed cable operators. Free agents

⁸ In Uttar Pradesh, there are 3,680 newspapers of which 354 are dailies (Govt. of India 1994).

⁹ These figure are from Govt. of India (1994: 142). As the next chapter will make clear, circulation figures give only the barest indication of readership. A single paper in a tea shop will be read by a significant proportion of its customers.

¹⁰ Newspapers in India are growing at unprecedented rates. Jeffrey (1993: 18) has noted that "the circulation of daily newspapers in all languages trebled between 1977 and 1992 - from 9.3 million to 28.1 million and the dailies per thousand people ratio doubled - from 15 daily newspapers per 1000 people to 32 per 1000".

became, as one *wallah* put it, *dalals*, agents between buyers and sellers, between Siti Cable and householders.

Simultaneously, programme production in the city began, allowing those connected to the city's cable networks glimpses of the city and its huge range of activities; political, social, religious, musical, criminal and municipal. The presence of Siti Cable and CTV has fed into an already vibrant 'newspaper culture' and thereby enlarged the entire sphere of local information and communicative, cultural and economic activity. There are continuities, but also tensions, between these media (and their personnel) and those that seek to administer or control their influence. These are most apparent between cable operators, the Indian government and the cinema industry.

The small scale and unregulated cable wallahs, delivering satellite TV to substantial numbers of urban homes, presented the Indian government with something of a headache. The popularity of satellite channels was draining advertising revenues from the DD network and creating a regulatory nightmare, in terms of both tax and censorship. In large part these problems of regulation have been ameliorated by the entry of larger scale operators into the industry, such as Siti Cable.

However, during my fieldwork, raids by government officials on cable operators were commonplace, and symptomatic of the atmosphere of distrust that surrounded my own research on this aspect of television. In February 1997, for example, the Additional District Magistrate and Assistant Tax Officer raided several operators, 'abused' them and then sealed off their equipment (cf. *Dainik Jagran* 20. ii. 97). The Varanasi Dish Antennae Exhibitor's Association (VDAEA), which had been established to deal with just these types of occasions and issues, called a meeting and concluded that such action was illegal. That night, the television screens of Varanasi went blank and householders forced to resort to DD were bereft: "Life was halved", said one. Another, more melodramatically remarked, "I felt like someone had died". The strike lasted for over a week, during which time the state governor was informed and lawyers consulted. Transmission recommenced with the issues largely unresolved.

With so many operators active in UP, and elsewhere in India, the issue of fiscal regulation was, at some point, going to arise. That it was pursued so vigorously reflected the concern of government that this unregulated industry should be reined in. But this was about more than just money. A phone call to Varanasi in October 1998 revealed that the Uttar Pradesh state government had banned the programme production operations of CTV and Siti Cable in Varanasi, and similar companies elsewhere in UP. Several motives lay behind this decision: it was a response to the issues of informational regulation, and reflected the growing unease of the government over their inability to control national and local news agendas. There were also fiscal issues at stake, but most important, the move came in response to pleas by the cinema industry. This is most pertinent to my work because it signals the growing domestication or privatisation of leisure for those that have the means to take a connection.

The relationship between cinema and television

Concerted lobbying by the Indian cinema industry in recent years has persuaded the national government that serious economic damage has been inflicted on the industry by the growing popularity of cable television. The cinema industry in Varanasi has not been immune to the increasingly domestic consumption of films. Before satellite and cable services began to draw people away from the silver screen, and just three years after the arrival of television in Varanasi, cinema hall owners began a strike. This closure was called to protest against increases in entertainment tax, though references were made to the impact of home entertainment (*Aaj* 16. x. 87).

By the time of fieldwork this issue of competition between cinemas and televisions had become much more pronounced. A news report on Zee TV (29. xi. 98) considered the attempts of the cinema industry (film makers and theatre owners) to stir the government into action. Venting their fury over the decline of cinema hall attendance, the claim was made that the country's 40,000 cable operators were inflicting Rs. 200 million damage on the cinema industry each year. Door receipts

were down because attendance levels had fallen sharply. Further, the fact that popular Hindi films were available soon after release on video (pirates or otherwise), or were broadcast on satellite channels, acted as a further disincentive to visit the cinema. The cinema industry has no fear that cinema is any less popular, but its ability to protect revenue has been hampered¹¹.

Personal experience suggests that the increased ownership of video players and the wide availability of films, many of which are pirated, has deflected audiences away from cinemas. A small video library near my neighbourhood specialised in pirate copies of recently released films. In tandem with a video repair business, the owner specialised in procuring copies of current films. Those who cannot, or do not want to take their family to the cinema are his customers, he claimed, stressing the benefits of such a set-up for Muslim families in the locality.

The booming business in pirate copies of newly released films is, ironically, probably a result of some of the concessions which the cinema industry has wrested from their prime rival, the upstart satellite channels. Three months must now pass between the release of a film and its premiere on television. Moreover, in towns and cities which are judged to have a 'reasonable' number of cinemas, cable operators are not allowed to run video channels, since these can be used to show current films in competition with local cinemas. Varanasi is considered to have enough cinemas to 'enforce' this regulation.

People expressed very different opinions about cinema-going in the age of abundant satellite channels. Some voiced the desire to still see films at the hall when they were released, others said that they could wait. Women and young girls often suggested that the availability of films in the comfort and safety of their own home was a welcome development, and necessitated fewer trips to the less than luxurious cinema halls of the city. On the other hand, other mothers said that their daughters went to the cinema more than ever.

¹¹ As a result of lower revenues, the 'black' money which has traditionally funded most Hindi film productions in Bollywood has begun to dry up. The Mafia are looking for more certain returns on their investments.

On the basis of personal observation, and following my earlier research into cinema in 1994, I felt that cinemas were less busy than before. However, such comments were greeted with statements about cinema going being popular in fits and spurts, and seasonal in nature. I saw plenty of films in near-empty halls and saw the unpopular film changed for an alternative within several days. I also saw riots outside the rather remote Tuxsal cinema three days before the super-hit *Dil to Pagal Hai* (Love is crazy) even began, such was the demand for tickets. Public or religious holidays often occasioned massive crowds of families outside cinemas.

Since films, *filmi* shows and film music chart shows (there are close to 30 weekly countdown shows) dominate satellite channels it would be clearly misleading to suggest that popular Hindi film is any less important. Certainly its very high visibility on the television screen may mean that people know more about films and their soundtracks than before and are in a better position to choose their films in advance. Whether a *filmi* excess on television has sated appetites for cinematic expeditions, or made audiences more demanding is a matter of debate. The increasing availability of Hollywood films in the city's theatres (*Titanic* ran for 13 'full house' weeks), and increased awareness of their alternative conventions through satellite television, are factors that also need to be considered.

What is clear in this rather uncertain picture is that there has been a certain relocation of mass-mediated entertainment over the thirteen years between the arrival of television in the city and the period of fieldwork. There are eighteen cinemas in Varanasi and one, the Ganga Palace was opened as late as 1991. However, others have now fallen into a state of disrepair and several have been closed in the period between 1984-97. During my fieldwork, the Lalita cinema in Bhelupura shut down, although it was unclear if this was a permanent development. At the same time the growth of video rental shops and the widespread popularity of satellite services, suggests a further domestication of the Hindi film¹².

¹² Figures from *Screen Digest* (September 1999) add weight to the general comments offered here. Total cinema admissions (in millions) for the years 1988, 1997 and 1998 are 4,700, 3,580 and 2,860. The average ticket price increased by more than 10 per cent between 1997-1998.

Operators and their customers

The most consistent disagreements between all these players hinge on each others' place on the media landscape. Cable operators fight battles amongst themselves as they try to maintain a physical presence in their neighbourhood, and their discussions are replete with the vocabulary of territorial disagreements. Respect for each others' 'boundaries' and the primacy of 'borders' which demarcate the 'area' (*ksetr*) which each operator oversees, are the major points of disagreements between these local vendors of a deterritorialised commodity. Some groups of operators continue to operate in small groups sharing information, technical knowledge, and occasionally, hardware. But since neighbourhoods flow into each other and the particular patch of an operator is often fixed only by oral or even unspoken agreement, each individual has to guard his territory very closely. The close contact that they try to maintain with connected households reflects the need to nurture good relations lest their rival poaches valuable customers. Therefore, although there is some camaraderie and a sense of common interest amongst operators, each protects his business very warily.

The comments that cable wallahs make about their customers display a keen sense of cultural differentiation across different areas of the city, in a way consistent with that explored in the previous chapter. The accounts of their business raises the issue of the cultural *and* economic capital involved in the connection of a house to cable television. Those who provide cable services in the old city talk of duplicitous customers who are unwilling to provide their subscription on time, of thieves who steal cable or use safety pins to hook themselves into the network. They also complain that, when compared to their fellow operators in the colonies, their catchment area is more socially 'backward', that households are slower to see the benefits of taking a connection and that their business is hampered as a result. Those in the more spacious colonies have few complaints about their customers and it is here, they argued, that the demand for the services first arose. Houses are too far apart, and the cable too inaccessible for anyone to be able to scratch off the plastic coating of the cable and hook themselves up. This approach, colony cable wallahs suggest, is the preserve of the cunning (*chaturai*) inhabitants of the old city.

My early assumptions about the class-based nature of cable and satellite television were quickly amended and rendered problematic. The cost of satellite television per month, Rs. 100, should be compared to the cost of a daily newspaper over a similar period (*Aaj* Rs. 64 or *Dainik Jagran* Rs. 94) or to the price of cinema tickets (cheapest about Rs. 15). For very many families a newspaper is not affordable or considered necessary and can be read by men in the course of their daily duties. Family trips to the cinema may be reserved for a festival holiday that coincides with the screening of a 'family film' at a local cinema or pocket money dispensed to well-behaved children to visit a film on their own.

However, although cable television is acknowledged as relatively good value in comparison with these other media there are plenty of families who cannot afford it. But to my mind there are significant numbers of households which have the economic wherewithal to connect up but have resisted doing so. Later sections of this work will outline in more detail what concerns guide resistance to cable television and how families that have decided to hook up organise their viewing so that the dangers they originally considered as an inescapable aspect of cable can be avoided or minimised. For now it will suffice to say that children, and their possible corruption are *the* dominant concern, but that they are emblematic of a more general disquiet about the pollution of Indian values. As we shall see, the relative social identities of the household viewing community are a prime concern in patterning access to the set and in decisions about what certain combinations of viewers will watch. The significance of the locally-based cable operators is that they allow considerable flexibility: connections are often taken during school holidays and terminated as soon as school begins again, or for the duration of a cricket series.

Cable operators in contrasting areas of the city made revealing comments about their customers in ways which created not just a 'landscape of taste' (Brunsdon 1991) but also of understanding. The colony operators reported that the issue of children did not present a barrier to increasing the number of connections they could make in an area. With their good education they were able to understand (*samajhdar*) and their parents were more willing to leave them unsupervised in front of the television. In the accounts of a (Hindu) operator in a predominantly Muslim *mohalla*, his non

customers were homologous to children who were unable to approach what they saw with understanding, or simply too traditionally minded to accept the ideas presented by satellite television. Unsurprisingly, residents rejected this categorisation declaring instead that they were poorer, and more hard working (*mehenti*) than their Hindu counterparts, and therefore did not watch satellite television. These accounts point to the complexity and range of opinions about satellite television in Varanasi which will be developed in more detail in remainder of this work.

There is no obvious parallel to the high brow/low brow distinction that exists between terrestrial and satellite television, as identified by Brunsdon (1991) for Britain. What is common in both contexts is the way that matters of taste, about what television it is better to like or watch, have very distinctive public and private aspects. Cable as supplied in Varanasi, unlike satellite in Britain, enters the house in quite an anonymous way, hidden by an aerial jumble of wires. There is nothing that obviously marks out a house in Varanasi as one that receives cable, so it is possible to receive what are seen as sometimes questionable programmes and maintain, if necessary, the façade of ^{lack of} ~~dis~~interest in satellite television.

The social organisation of a media space.

This chapter has illustrated that Varanasi represents a very rich and varied media space, and that there are significant continuities and discontinuities between the various media in the city. On the one hand, global television services emanating from outside the city (and the country) were originally provided by satellite operators who had control over what they provided to households in their neighbourhood. The arrival of Siti Cable precipitated a standardisation in services (and prices), but a remnant of neighbourhood control remains, and particularistic ties between operator and customers have been retained. Siti Cable (and CTV) have started to produce "intimately local" programming but at the same time broadened the number of international, national and regional channels available within the household. Local programme production is allied with the delivery of global television services.

However, disputes between operators, the government, the cinema industry and global media companies suggest a certain degree of discontinuity, competition and therefore friction between these agencies. Local programme production concerns the government which is unable to control the media agenda in the way it was previously able. The cinema industry is reeling from the widespread availability of Hindi films within the home and what appears to be the growing privatisation of Hindi film consumption. Cable operators, representing a highly unregulated 'cottage industry', are facing attempts at regulation from the government and from global media corporations who need to safeguard their revenues. These tensions highlight what each party feels to be at stake. The territorial vocabulary that operators use in defining and defending their customer base is symptomatic of the larger picture. The players involved in these 'media wars' are fighting to control their share of the media cake, to maximise profits or maintain control of the agenda.

However, the nature of locally produced programmes has been shown to have a clear continuity with extant print media in the city. It has been argued that local television is operating within an entirely familiar framework, and in this sense represents an extension and amplification of an existing sphere of media activity. The following chapter takes this as a central theme; it seeks to cast the use of print media and local television in a perspective that highlights the gendered nature of its use and implications and the relationship of these media to the spaces of the city.

CHAPTER FIVE

Locating the public sphere

Introduction

In 1941, a local scholar felt able to say that “with the exception of political events [i.e., nationalist agitation], the general public is more interested in Municipal administration than with any other topic” (B. Singh, cited in Freitag 1989a: 16). This chapter is not wholly concerned with Municipal affairs, although my account will touch on these. Instead, it asks where and how this ‘public’ comes to be constituted and what ‘public’ means in this context. I argue that tea shops (*chay ki dukan*) are a primary arena for the construction of a public (but not exclusively political) sphere. However, I suggest that such shops, and the activities of their customers, cannot be understood in isolation from women and the home. Therefore, in line with the approach of the preceding chapter, I illustrate the relationship between the print-orientated, male space of the tea shop and the emergence of local television which broadcasts a similar range of ‘affairs’ to the home. The intention is to generate a sense of movement, both of bodies and information, between the house and the outside, between the worlds of women and of men.

The chapter begins by discussing the tea shops in the city. Although tea shops are a prevalent feature of North Indian life, their place in society has yet to be studied. They are central sites for the consumption of newspapers and the production of views, arenas of sociality and nodal points within communicative networks. Tea shops have an important place in the political and social life of the city. Public opinion is generated in such centres, and they could provide one of the major points of entry for an anthropology of politics, although this is not the objective here. Instead, I want to highlight their “world disclosing role” (Calhoun 1992: 34).

This chapter seeks to locate the public sphere through newspapers, their readers and the tea shops they visit. The concept of the public sphere is used advisedly and in a limited sense. Habermas (1989) identifies the public sphere as a specific historical formation, which arose in eighteenth century Western Europe with the transition from absolutist to more democratic forms of government. It signifies a sphere between the state and civil society in which (male) individuals could join in rational-critical debate bearing on matters of state authority and, by so doing, form public opinion. Coffee houses in urban centres were, according to Habermas, central sites where such activity occurred and so in this, and other respects, tea shops represent these dimensions of his original formulation.

Habermas' public sphere is a male sphere whose existence is premised on the exclusion of women, and strict public and domestic distinctions. In line with recent reappraisals of the original Habermas thesis (cf. Calhoun 1992), particularly from a feminist perspective (cf. Benhabib 1992), this chapter seeks to put women more firmly in the analysis. Therefore, I explore the impact of local television on women's access to public opinion, and visual access to events in what is predominantly male public space.

What has become clear is that, in the context of television, a wider consideration of public and domestic space in Varanasi is required. A Municipal 'anti-encroachment' campaign in the city, an event which forced people to confront various conflicting ideas about public/private and inside/outside, and was itself highly televised, is used to guide this discussion.

Tea shops: the discussion markets and their connections to the home.

As I grew to be more comfortable in my surroundings, but increasingly frustrated by my inability to gain repeated access to the domestic sphere, I turned towards tea shops. Throughout my time in Varanasi, it was clear that if I wanted to know what was happening in the city then tea shops were a good place to frequent. Tea shops became, in short, my way into the city: places where I could get to know and be

known, somewhere to break a journey through the city, drink the hot, sugary *chay* and indulge in 'butter slice', toast thickly covered with butter and black salt.

Tea shops, as hubs of communication, discussion and media consumption, are much more than places to stop for tea. They are a place to pick up a piece of newspaper and with it some of the concerns of the day¹. As Poddar writes of *adda*, (a sort of private *salon* in Bengal), so the same can be said of tea shops: "all questions connected with local politics, social reform, education, literature, religion, metaphysics, jurisprudence, political economy, scientific outlook, theories of state and of society...and the future shape of India" are discussed (cited in Hannerz 1992: 208). The range of topics, and the depth to which they are pursued, depends on the tea shop. Some are renowned for political discussion, and as meeting places for members of particular parties. Others, located in commercial centres such as Chowk, embrace more mercantile topics. All are arenas in which "cultural scanning" occurs (Hannerz *ibid.*), where issues are located, discussed, debated (often fiercely) and experiences are related and employed in the construction of perspectives. It is in such sites that understandings, of any topic, are exchanged. The newspapers themselves often refer to these communicative arenas in a way which stresses the transaction of meaning, in what are referred to as 'discussion markets', *charcha ke bazaar*.

Most tea shops have at least one newspaper, which is bought by the owner before being physically and discursively dissected by his customers. The paper is split and read quietly or aloud to those present. Topics of conversation are often cued by a prescient or 'hot' (*garam*) story; on other days conversation drifts haphazardly without being focused on any one issue or story in particular. Regulars barely consider themselves as customers, instead they refer to the shops as clubs in which they are members. Their commitment to these clubs is illustrated by the distances that some travel to visit them: they are often geographically removed from their places of work or residence. The centrality that they have in men's lives, the friendships and

¹ Gupta (1995) and Herzfeld (1992) are two anthropologists who have looked at the place of newspapers in local politics and discussion.

friendships and community embedded within tea shops is borne out by the length of time that they spend there on any single day.

Shops rarely take a name, other than that of the owner who is treated akin to a patron of the activities which are associated with his shop. Since the primary ingredient in tea is milk, and members of the Ahir², or cow-herding community, are best placed to provide this, most shops are owned by them. If patronising a shop frequently is akin to being a member of it, then most shops represent something of a broad church. Distinctions between the 'members' were rarely made, except in terms of rhetorical skill, debating prowess, some type of informational expertise or general sense of *jouissance*. In this respect tea shops constitute a nodal point of the public sphere in the Habermasian sense, where there is an equality of status. What matters is less the identity of the speaker but the perceived quality of his argument or opinion (cf. Habermas 1989; Calhoun 1992).

It may be as well, at this juncture, to briefly describe a tea shop and cast a glance over the newspaper items which concerned the fraternity of tea drinkers and debaters within it.

Kali's tea shop.

Situated not far from Harishchandra ghat, one of the two cremation ghats in the city, Kali's tea shop is open almost twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It is run by his three sons on a shift basis. Many customers remember when it was run by their grandfather, after whose death Kali took charge. Now that his sons are old enough to manage the shop he devotes more time to his water buffalo, which provide the shop's milk, and to the enjoyment that he sees as his right at this stage in life.

² Ahirs, in the current atmosphere of low caste self-empowerment, are now referred to, and refer to themselves, as Yadav.

Covering the walls of the shop are calendar posters of the Hindu pantheon, as well as 'pop art', including pictures of Madhuri Dixit, many young men's heart throb. After a *Diwali* clean and repaint, a frame of Congress party photographs was hung in the centre of the shop and a new sign indicating available products posted. Inside there are fans, basic tables and chairs. Discarded pan leaves and cigarette ends litter the floor, along with bits of well read newspaper.

Mice scamper along the picture frames, hugging the wall until they reach the safety of an unseen corner. In one corner milk is stored or simmered on a huge gas ring. A radio is tuned into *Vividh Bharati*³ or the broadcast of *Akashvaani* in the city. Outside a deep hole full of coal burns day and night. Along the outside length of the shop is a low seat, covered in sackcloth. In the morning, when the sun is still low, people sit outside, exhorting wandering cows to move on and stray dogs to move.

Inside voices can be heard, rising and falling, reflecting the intensity of the current conversation. Greetings are made, chairs offered and pieces of newspaper sought after. Young children entrusted to their elders are entertained, doted upon. Boys are sent out to get *pan*, with reminders about what it should contain. Orders for tea (Rs.1) and toast (Rs 5) are placed and reconfirmed: '*Pani le ke aao*,' requests a man spitting the remainder of his pan outside, '*phir chay pila do*' ; "bring water, then serve me *chay*".

Between eight and ten in the morning the shop is busy. If debate and discussion is of particular interest or interminable the appointed hour of work may slip past unnoticed. There is a paper shop nearby which delivers papers in the surrounding two *mohallas*⁴, though I never saw any visitor to Kali's shop buy a paper there before coming to the tea shop. A few have a paper delivered to their home but this

³ Akashvaani is the popular name for All India Radio (AIR), which arrived in the city in 1962. *Vividh Bharati* (VB), the commercial division of AIR arrived in Varanasi in 1993 (Govt. of India 1996: 46, 57). Radios, especially tuned to VB, are a common feature of tea shops providing popular 'surround' sound. In view of my argument in this chapter, it can be noted that televisions are *very* uncommon in tea shops, although sometimes they are temporarily installed for a big cricket match.

⁴ The shopkeeper reported that he delivered 200 papers to 150 houses in the area. These include 35 copies of *Aaj* and *Dainik Jagran* (30).

represents something of an unaffordable luxury for most. For most, as their wives concur, 'their tea shop' or 'hotel' is where they get to read a paper.

Since many of the customers at Kali's shop are involved in aspects of the sari trade they work in proximity to each other and leave en masse. Often this requires some encouragement or a reminder that enough time has been wasted. The Hindu merchants, with whom these sari workers have both close personal and business relationships, can stay longer and often retire to a *pan wallah* across the street before finally setting out to work. For these sari weavers and printers Kali's is a place to talk shop.

Young men often arrive slightly later, forming the second shift of the day. Most are either un- or under-employed and the imperatives of work impinge less on their daily routine. They often come in briefly to check the cricket scores or inspect the film listings. The same group of men hover around the barber shop down the road which has a television on display for customers and others. For them, these shops offer a base: a place to meet, chat or arrange a trip to the cinema. Most are encouraged, or feel obliged, to stay out of the house rather than remain at home during the day. However, their presence there later at night is not welcomed by their parents. This shop and the barber's down the street are locations for passing time (*time pass karna*) with their friends. Both are places around which they gather to survey the passing scene as they themselves become part of it, which is not to say that they are fruitlessly 'hanging out'⁵:

The young men...idling on the corner, in a little group clustered round the shop...moving about...singly or in twos or threes in the early hours of the morning when all good men are asleep, see, talk, observe, gossip, keep silent, plan, spy, share secrets, confer, organise, pass on messages. They build up their own store of 'secret knowledge', which is part of a kind of underlife culture and covert challenge to authority...[T]hey form a dense network of relations and information and in doing so a means by which families can keep in touch with the crucial minutiae of daily life (Gilsenan 1982: 122).

⁵ Young men such as these often form clubs which meet informally for cricket or in a more formal sense to organise neighbourhood festivities which are left to those their age, e.g., the *Holika* fires on the night before *Holi*, *Id Milan* and Saraswati puja. This particular group's club was called the 'The Great Sporting Club', and contained c.20 members, both Hindu and Muslim.

The attractions of a tea shop are many. It is a roof over one's head, and a place to meet friends. For those who cannot afford a paper, tea shops represent a place to take a break, read and chat idly, or animatedly, with friends. For those who cannot read, the local tea shop is a place to be read to, to stay in touch. A tea shop offers escape from work and home, and represents a vantage point from which to view the world. But, like the boys who observe passing life and become part of it, those who engage with the world that the newspapers and discussion provide, disclose and also create their world.



Plate 6: 2. Passing time at the barber shop.

An impressionistic survey of newspaper content.

The front page of *Dainik Jagran* leads with a picture of bathers at the *sangam* (confluence) in Allahabad, 35 lakh people are reported to have been present. In the capital, the CBI have questioned Sita Ram Kesri for the third time. In Varanasi, the Korean ambassador and the Vice Chancellor of BHU discuss possibilities for academic co-operation. Two die in a collision between a Maruti and a truck on the Grand

Trunk road. Adverts alert readers to special prices for refrigerators on the occasion of *Id Mubarak*. According to the World Bank, India's economy could overtake China's by 2006. In the Braj region preparations are underway for Holi, meanwhile Arafat and Netanyahu discuss many issues during a two hour meeting. The owner of a famous *thundai* stall in Godaulia dies, as a mark of respect her shop remains closed. With the BHU student association elections approaching political activities intensify. In Bhelupura, a Hero Honda motorcycle was stolen. At the *Shiv Sena* offices in Kammachha the committee for liberating the Gyanvapi temple meets today. On the fifth day of free medical camps in the city, 4402 people are treated. A plea has been made by Sri Pannalal Yadav, BJP representative of Shivala ward for street cleaning to be performed and street lighting maintained. High school and Inter-college examinations begin today. Details of civic arrangements for *Maha Shivratri* are announced; shopkeepers are implored to keep their stores shut. The next day photographs show devotees queuing to take *darshan* at Gyanvapi. The government is soon to take a decision on the recommendations of the 5th pay commission report. In memory of Prof. Gopal Tripathi a chair in Chemical Engineering is established at BHU. The former irrigation minister and senior BJP leader, Om Prakash Singh said that to establish a healthy and strong society school children must be given *sanskarik* education. In England, George Gardiner has left the Conservative party. A rickshaw driver is beaten up at Sigra roundabout by some passengers unseated in a traffic accident. The Congress in U.P claims that the BSP (Bahujan Samaj) has betrayed the Dalits by joining with the BJP. The Congress blames the Samajwadi Party (which refused to support Mayawati when she asked the UF (United Front) to back her claim to be Chief Minister), and thus forced the BSP to seek the support of the BJP. "Holi is celebrated in a subdued fashion because of the terrible high prices". A large quantity of fake Levi Strauss jeans is seized by representatives of the company in Colombia. The student elections

get underway at Kashi Vidyapeeth University. An article reports that an American company has taken out a patent on the names of various rices that sound like Basmati (e.g., Kasmati, Texmati, Jasmati and Kismati). An editorial discusses the Indo-Pakistan talks and the progress of the prohibition movement in Andhra Pradesh.

The articles detailed above are merely a random selection. Some would have been discussed in Kali's shop, others not. Editorials and the business pages were never the subject of more than occasional fleeting glances. In other tea shops, noted for their highly literate clientele or political inclinations, these detailed commentaries, couched in Sanskritic Hindi, were more likely to be taken up for discussion. At Kali's, the lottery numbers were more likely to be read than share prices. Since many of the customers at Kali's shop were Muslim, and their first language Urdu, it was often the shorter, more local articles which were the focus of attention. The refined, *parishkrt*, language of the print media was beyond their grasp, but where they faltered, educated Hindu regulars had little difficulty. The newspaper resembled an à la carte menu, providing suggestions for daily discussions in which the concerns of those present were aired. References which were not fully understood, or contexts alluded to but not described, could be explained by other customers.

On 15th April 1997, a fire raged at one of the sites housing pilgrims in Mecca. The day that the news broke, customers in Kali's tea shop took up this story, trying to piece together what was given in the papers with their own knowledge of what might have happened. One man, to bolster the opinion that he had just expressed, quoted a small statement from the paper: "of those killed most are from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh". This was of no small concern to those present, some of whom had relatives or friends who were taking part in the pilgrimage. The number of Indian pilgrims who had departed was debated, as was the question of how many pilgrims in total were in Saudi Arabia. One man present began a diatribe against the organisers, accusing them of treating Indians as second class citizens, reminding his fellows that their ill-conceived preparations had killed Indian Muslims before when a bridge collapsed. Another argued that the Saudi Arabians must not be blamed, and went on to talk of the telephone calls that a friend's relative had received from a *Haji*,

reassuring him that all was well. Conversation drifted on to more general discussion about the Haj, and Indian government organisation of the Indian Muslim participants in it.

Anon, those still present started to trade their understandings of Saudi Arabia: how hot it was, how expensive it was, how every place was air-conditioned, that no *dhal* and rice is available, only meat. The organisation of the *Kumbha mela* followed and one participant noted how one day of bathing took two years of planning, and that the chief organiser for the *mela* at Haridwar in 1998 was the former District Magistrate of Varanasi. "Where is the *mela* held?", someone asked. An answer followed, but no one knew where Ujain was. Through ill-remembered twists and turns the conversation moved on to London, and its wealth. Everyone expressed disbelief when I told them that some people live in cardboard boxes outside shops, that they have no homes, that not everyone is wealthy.

I understood better the process through which, as a group, people in tea shops such as this construct understandings of the world, when six months later, on hearing a man say everyone in London was rich, another retorted, "No, brother, in London some people live in cardboard boxes...ask him". My position as an interlocutor between cultures was most clearly felt in Kali's shop. Indeed it often felt like I was the subject of an ethnographic account being written by its customers. I was used as spokesman for 'the West' just as I was using tea drinkers at Kali's as spokesmen for Varanasi. This sensitised me to the process of dialogue that is crucial in such shops, both between people and between the home and the shop. I was often asked to explain things seen on television or account for one representation of the foreign (*bidesh*) which conflicted with another. However, although I was probably the most unusual (and longstandingly unusual) customer that Kali's had seen, I judged that the role foisted on me, and that I foisted on others, was entirely typical. If someone has experience of something that others do not have, the tea shop is one place where people expect this to be shared, for the increased knowledge of all. All the customers, in their own way or inimical style, and at different times, 'disclose' or relate the world as they know (or see it). Others can reconstruct or re-evaluate their understanding of the 'world' accordingly. I like to think that, through such a

dialogical process, those at Kali's shop learnt as much from me as I learnt from them.

Reading in groups not only offers occasions for explicitly collective textual interpretation, but encourages new forms of association, and nurtures new ideas that are developed in conversation with other people...[G]roups often form because of a subtext of shared values, and the text itself is often a pretext (though an invaluable one) for the conversation through which members engage not only with the authorial 'other' but with each other as well (Long 1993: 194).

The single most noticeable fact about all tea shops and their clientele is the highly shared nature of the activities within them. Neither newspaper reading, nor the discussion this engenders, "is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull" (Anderson 1983: 35). The single newspaper is shared, the stories or issues worked on as a group and concomitant meanings, if not agreed upon by all, approximate to something of a consensus. This is not to argue that all who enter into debates have similar perspectives on the issues they confront, nor that interaction between people and news simply confirms prior ideas about the world. Tea shops are important as arenas in which meanings are not confirmed, or restated, but also created out of the clash of perspectives. The fact that tea shops represent something akin to clubs or public *salons* should not be taken to mean that they represent sealed off information networks (cf. Herzfeld 1992: 100).

The poetics of debate and discussion suggest that this vigorous process of meaning making, of perspectival alignment, is informed by differences in the life situations of participants. Elder members of the community in Kali's tea shop would try to dominate discussion, addressing young men as *beta* (son) as they outlined their views on a topic. The views of particular men were always sought, by young and old alike. The content of statements *and* the rhetorical flair with which they were delivered were judged. Those that could truly 'do things with words' had their contributions greeted with cries of "*sahi kah rahe hai*", "too true, precisely". Seniority was judged by experience of the world, and the ability to transmit this wisdom in an erudite and/or comic fashion was highly regarded. It is here that young men learn about the world, and accumulate the skill required to transact their understandings in such arenas.

Kali's tea shop was one of the less political I visited. It was not apolitical, but politics was less discussed than more quotidian issues such as health, work, family, local activities and protests, and comings and goings in the *mohalla*. "We are all brothers here", it was often said, and politics was viewed as potentially divisive to this sense of family cohesion. Health, poverty and the cost of living were issues which would often predominate; topics not seen as amenable to political solutions but rather as things to discuss as 'brothers', friends and fellow sufferers. Politics was auxiliary to the concern of securing *roz roti*, (lit. daily bread, a living). In other tea shops, customers at Kali's would reason, intellectuals had time for such affairs, we must feed our family first.

An annotated waste bin, at a well respected and frequented pan shop near Kali's tea shop, lampooned the politics of the city and men's complete existential involvement in it: on each side of the metal container a theme of recent local discussion, particularly the municipal *atikraman hatao abhiyan* (anti-encroachment drive), was satirised in verse. One side mirrored, with just a hint of sarcasm, the sense that undue attention to politics can be counterproductive:

Politicians and political discussion causes damage to the mind.
Please do not have faith in them.

Politics in the community.

Kali's tea shop is broadly representative of many across the city in which party politics is not foremost on the agenda of the clientele. It is also typical of a more general characteristic of tea shops pertinent to my discussion here which is that tea shops act as a filter through which the city passes into houses. As primary sites for the consumption of print media they provide a crucial means through which local stories, issues and events pass from the public sphere into homes. As sites for the congregation of 'private people', tea shops are where more domestic affairs filter into the public sphere. Ideas and news flow into, and out of these shops, carried in both directions by men.

As places in which perspectives and understandings are traded, they are sites for the production and consumption of views on the world. Tea shops service a huge range of personal, social, political and professional networks, through which somebody like myself, with few contacts, little local knowledge and a desire to know what was moving the city, could become orientated. While tea shops provided me with an important window onto the world of Varanasi, they also do this for their more permanent customers too.

The world that tea shops reveal to men is taken home or repatriated by them and does not remain the exclusive property of men. One repeated criticism of the Habermasian public sphere has been its drawing of discrete boundaries between the public and private worlds. Feminist criticism (e.g., Benhabib 1992) has pointed to the public sphere, in his model, as similar in nature to the Greek *polis* which existed only by exclusion of women. However, discussion in Kali's shop repeatedly drew on insights from domestic life, in which the opinions of women were recounted and considered. In a topographic sense, tea shops are exclusively male, but discursively they include women and their opinions. Further, perspectives created in this public sphere may be taken home, but are likely to be returned to the tea shop the next day, with a domestic viewpoint included.

I have suggested that tea shops are often sites of organisation for local politics, of a community, interest group or party. However, while men's total existential absorption in the field of politics is highly regarded by some, others view politics with more suspicion. The presence of Hindus and Muslims at Kali's may be key here: politicians, rather than people, were more likely to be blamed for creating divisions between religious communities, and politics was treated as a necessary evil rather than an end in itself. In this way, men at Kali's tea shop shared a perception of politics that was often espoused by women: namely that politics is an activity marginal to the everyday pursuit of sustenance and security and one which created a violent and divisive society rather than ameliorating these features.

Prabhudatt, a close friend, once commented, when I reported that I had seen the bullet-riddled van of four university leaders who had been shot dead with AK 47s,

that I was lucky to be getting a sense of what the city was really like. His wife, Pintu, angrily retorted that this was not a good thing. Neither that it had happened, nor that I should see it, should be considered a matter of 'luck'. Just a few days later, I was sitting in a restaurant across the street from Kali's when a 'bomb' (a bundle of army thunder flashes) was thrown into the shop. The assailants escaped by scooter, as a huge crowd assembled round the shop. Prabhudatt was concerned for my safety, but again commented that I was getting closer and closer to a more realistic view of the city. Pintu claimed that, in reality, the city was not always like this.

Describing a holy city such as Varanasi as a violent and highly politicised one is, as the disparate responses of Prabhudatt and Pintu attest, either to portray it how it is, or to stress the unsavoury at the expense of the sacred. A catalogue of murders, kidnappings, the dismembering of a *sadhu*, of small incendiary devices, shootings, of student protests ending in violence and death could be made. Allied with it might be a short account of the politics of the state during my fieldwork, in which President's Rule endured for almost nine months, until the unlikely alliance of the low-caste Bahujan Samaj party and high caste BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) was forged. More locally an account would mention the power of local 'dons' or Mafia chiefs, especially in the anarchic eastern fringes of Uttar Pradesh. Some would say that Mafioso like Om Shankar Tiwari are more powerful than any elected politician; few would disagree with the contention that it is often difficult to distinguish between politicians and local dons. Both have armed protection, the MP's is provided by the state, the don's by *goondas* (thugs), both are rich and their gains ill-gotten. The nexus between money, power, criminality and politics is a recognised feature of public life. The discourse of corruption (Gupta 1995) is all pervasive.

This world of politics is, to some extent, that of men. This is not to argue that women do not care, either about local or national political developments (indeed a good few I talked with were more eloquent on these matters than men). It can be argued, however, that the structural position of the sites in which these debates occur, around *pan* vendors and in tea shops, which are exclusively male, serves to exclude women from this field of activity. This exclusion, and the often unsavoury outcome of politics, serves to legitimate women's disavowal of the activity of politics

in general and the locations in which it occurs. Women were likely to decry the shops as places where men wasted time and money, discussing issues which had only tangential impact on the day-to-day concerns of a family. Some might express resignation that they could do little about, and certainly not question, the amount of time their husband spent in his tea shop or chewing *pan*.

However, the flow of information is far from one way. Although the gendered nature of the 'discussion markets' excludes women, they are busy in similar communicative labours during their day. A portrait of neighbourhood life that depicts women sitting talking on their doorsteps and men labouring over local or national politics would be reproducing a European contrast between "(male) rationality and (female) gossip" (Herzfeld 1987: 96). This distinction suggests that significant social change occurs from the outside in, through the activities of men organised in the public sphere. Moreover, understandings of gossip as the very opposite of authenticated fact, obscure the sense in which the discussions of men and women are processes through which meaning is authorised. Both seek to authenticate the nature of occurrences and determine their meanings. The value and implications of such activities need to be differentiated from their factuality. Attention should be drawn to the understanding they generate, not to their veracity.

Women are also transacting meanings as they move between houses on social calls or whilst running errands. They can keep the household informed about neighbourhood activities or events, and the movement of prices in the market. In fact, women's control over daily household expenditure indicates a high degree of interaction in the economic sphere. And, since they are privy to the women's side of the world, they can offer a significant commentary from this perspective which would otherwise remain unknown to men. Men often refer to women's discussions as gossip (*gap karna*) albeit with a recognition that their own discussions (*charcha*) could be similarly construed by women. The activity of talking is, they admit, relatively similar whether men or women spend their time doing it⁶. The key difference

⁶ McGregor (1993: 306) defines *charcha* as discussion, gossip or rumour. Whilst men would define their chat as 'discussion', women seem, on the basis of this definition, justified in suggesting that it may be no more than gossip or rumour.

between politics and neighbourhood affairs is, in the end, that of scale (Herzfeld 1992: 96): men's discussions are more likely to cover topics of national and state affairs, which makes them more prone to represent their activities as of greater significance than women's.

The outside as space and category in Varanasi.

As Papanek has noted, in societies in which some form of *purdah* system operates, the male fieldworker is likely to experience far less role flexibility than one who is female (1973: 290). Paradoxically, freedom on the outside for men results in a relative lack of access to the household sphere, whilst women are able to operate with some degree of freedom both within and outside the house. My orientation towards tea shops like Kali's was a direct result of experiences of this nature and continued contacts with such shops gave me access to one world. It was clear however that household access was required and, although some introductions occurred through Kali's shop, these were rather limited in their results. I employed the help of a female research assistant through whom some lasting family contacts were made. In time I located households in which sons, brothers or fathers (in law) were present during the day and who lessened the threat that a young male (from outside, *bahar*) presented.

The nature of this problem, and the process through which it was (partially) overcome, was itself a means of gaining insights into the discrete and complementary nature of the private and public spheres. I grew to have some understanding of women's lives within the household, and on their interactions with the world outside it.

Papanek identifies a gendered division of labour as a crucial aspect of the 'separate worlds' in a system of *purdah*. Further, she argues, this creates a great interdependency between men and women (ibid.: 293). One aspect of that interdependence, signalled above, is that of creating and nurturing links between the household and the outside. For men, consumption and discussion of news in tea and

pan shops form social and information networks. Women too are crucial in initiating and sustaining inter-household relations (Werbner 1990: 126) through their close contacts in the neighbourhood. These might be across rooftops as they work during the day or further afield as they run errands away from the house.

Purdah, which in a broad sense relates to status, task allocation, social distancing and the maintenance of moral standards (Papanek 1973: 292) operates through two domains: the inside and outside. Status can be achieved through secluding women and moral standards maintained by disallowing the opportunity for them to be breached through exposure or social mixing. It is clear that some thing, or some people, need protecting from “forces originating elsewhere” (ibid.: 315), and that, through such protection, status and morality can be safeguarded. The elsewhere is the significant aspect of this formulation, a sphere which for men and women, and Hindus and Muslims, is differentially defined and evaluated.

While it is commonly assumed that *purdah* in Islam stresses kin *vis-à-vis* the outside, and for Hindus avoidance relations between affines (ibid.: 302), the picture is more complex. Varanasi is a syncretic city in which *purdah* operates in relation to “the outside” for both Hindu and Muslim. Seclusion from this generalised outside is significant for both communities, while for Hindu women relations of avoidance are important too. Moreover the degree to which *purdah* is kept is difficult to comment upon, being dependent on definition. Some might term movement around the city veiled as maintenance of *purdah*, others might employ stricter criteria. Accordingly, Muslim women wearing a *burqa*, and therefore able to move about on the outside, could be seen to enjoy greater mobility than many Hindu women I knew, who very rarely left the precincts of their house.

Therefore we need to recognise two points. First that *purdah* is not a monolithic, monovalent institution. It can have a massive range of meanings, for men and women, across class, caste and religion. It is an institution that can be welcomed or resisted. In Varanasi, some women questioned the dominant male ideology that limited their freedom to leave the house alone, pursue education or careers, (without this threatening their, or their family’s, honour). Others expressed gladness that

through seclusion they were delivered from the discomforts of the outside. A Muslim woman who noted that “we work outside so that we can keep *purdah*” was expressing the paradoxical nature of women’s experience of the outside. Excursions outside to pursue employment provide the means for remaining inside at other times; a means to an end. Secondly, and this is a context of a later chapter, *purdah* is founded on the “notion of one person, or group of persons, embodying important attributes of another person or group of people” (Papanek *ibid.*: 317). Women assume an iconicity in articulating the status, standards and values of their men.

The allocation of living space that *purdah* represents is often writ large in public spaces. At many cinemas in the city there are separate queues for women, enabling the purchase of tickets without the pressures and crush of the men’s lines. At public events, e.g., a *lila* (religious play), a whole section of the space for the audience will be marked out, quite specifically for women unaccompanied by men. During *Durga Puja*, the marquees through which thousands of people pass to take *darshan* are divided down the middle; one side for men, the other for women. Through such spatial divisions it becomes possible for women (accompanied or otherwise) to participate in ostensibly male spaces.

In such public spaces at certain events the safety represented by the house is replicated, a “symbolic shelter” (Papanek 1973) is reproduced. Spatial divisions between men and women are maintained. In more quotidian contexts, the public spaces of the city can represent a much greater threat for women. Here divisions between men and women are maintained through tacit but unstable agreements and are therefore more easily compromised. Many with whom I spoke knew of women who had been molested, ‘eve-teasing’ is the local euphemism, nearly all worried for the safety and reputation of their daughters, even when accompanied by a brother or friend. One had had a gold chain snatched just outside a major temple in the city, by a man speeding past on a moped. Men are often represented by women as salacious, leering or downright violent. In the most vehement of statements they are no better than the packs of stray dogs that roam the city: *dogla*, cross-breeds or bastards.

The claim that “as public spaces grow more violent, disorderly and uncomfortable, those who can afford it consume their spectacles in the company of their friends and family, on television” (Breckenridge 1996: 10), is one that has considerable implications for women. During an earlier research project in the city I had been aware of the impact of satellite television services on women’s consumption of films. Cinemas are, as the existence of a separate ticket queue for women reiterates, male spaces in which a place for women must be clearly inscribed. The availability of film channels provides scope for film-watching without the necessity of venturing into the hot, crowded and often irksome public arena of a cinema. Some cinemas, notably those that are more expensive, are favoured by young women over the less salubrious picture halls. One mother noted that the abundance of films and *filmi* programmes on television had actually resulted in the opposite tendency to that described here. She described how her daughter, in her third year at BHU, was not always content to watch films at home. Instead, she wanted to go straight to the cinema hall rather than waiting for a film to be broadcast on Zee Cinema. This, her mother added, was a trend for “girls these days”, girls who “even watch Star TV”.

Others have more restricting parents, or would never think to ask permission to visit the cinema with a group of girlfriends. For them, and their older counterparts, whose mobility is more limited, electronic media such as the telephone (Papanek 1973: 321) and televisions or VCR, can de-link social situations from their physical locations (cf. Meyrowitz 1985). The telephone, for the young women I knew, was an important medium that sustained information networks and helped maintain bonds of sociality across the city. Often, when visiting households, the phone would ring, a teenage girl would grab it, and begin an animated conversation about a planned cinema trip or the previous evening’s episode of *The Young and the Restless*. Indeed the phone was often used to arrange surreptitious viewing of this programme by those in whose homes it was explicitly banned. For young men of a similar age, more sustained and open access to information hubs such as tea shops provided analogous lines of communication to those that a telephone can provide for women. Telephones, VCR and television (particularly where cable connected) are media which can provide access to information and films without the necessity to leave the ‘symbolic shelter’ of the house.



Plate 5: 2. The male public sphere. Men gather for the results of the 'Lucky Draw' at the site of the Machchodari Durga puja *pandal* (marquee), Visheshwarganj, 19. x. 97.

Space, gender and televisual leisure.

The introduction, on the local Siti Channel, of programmes that brings news from around the city and telecasts of musical and other events, was significant in that it opened up the household to a far greater range of news and views (discursive and visual) from around the city. I found that men, but especially women, greeted this development with enthusiasm. The commencement of daily local news programmes has created fresh avenues for communication between the house and the city.

The events that are packaged into the nightly news shows are neighbourhood festivals, press conferences, political meetings, reports on crime stories or perhaps a demonstration. These happenings are the primary material of newspapers and the sites of their discussion: *pan* and *chay* shops. They are most often organised, attended, perpetrated and celebrated by men. Festivals, of a neighbourhood or more city-wide significance, (e.g., *Durga* or *Saraswati Puja*), are often organised by men's associations (cf. Sarma 1969) and, although such festivals are not exclusively 'male', men predominate and a rather over-enthusiastic masculinity pervades. Some neighbourhood processions or performances do not begin until after dark and continue into the night: the presence of women would not be advised by men or women. On one level, therefore, an exclusion operates through the gendered nature of outside space. While arrangements are often made for women, and this allows for their attendance, my impression was that they do not attend such events in great numbers⁷.

Any of the various events broadcast on Siti Channel may not be attended in person for an entirely different reason. They might be those of a specific community, religion or caste group, political party or neighbourhood committee at which, unsurprisingly, few 'outsiders' are to be found. They are events with a small

⁷ In Varanasi there is such a huge range of events that any generalisation about their gendered nature is obviously problematic. Those unwilling to accept my strictly segmented account might consider Nita Kumar's comment on the type of events she attended: "I was the only woman in the whole gathering of thousands" (1988: 242). For further reflection on the 'perils' facing women, and female fieldworkers, at such events see also her fieldwork memoirs (1992: 179-84 and *passim*).

constituency which find greater prominence within an electronically extended public sphere.

Lolark Chhat, which is celebrated by women who are infertile, was one such festival which received coverage on Siti news. The events take place around the Lolark tank but extend along a one kilometre stretch of road to the *Kīna Ram* ashram in Sonapura (cf. Parry 1994: 289 n3). Along the road are encampments of people from the city and environs, food stalls and vendors selling requisite items. It is a large event but, according to Kumar (1988: 130-3), significantly less of a *mela* (fair) now than in the past. Those who have no need to go to the festival, or live far from this southern area of the city would ordinarily have little or no contact with it.

Siti Halchal, on this day, gave viewers a long and quite intimate degree of contact with *Lolark Chhat*. The intensity of the action at Lolark *kund* (tank) and the crowds along the street formed the centrepiece of this news item. This festival is a complex example because, notwithstanding its quite narrow constituency, it was once the occasion for a huge *mela*. What we see therefore is not only increased access to such a festival through television, but also the sense in which its 'publicness' grows in other ways even as its *mela* is less well patronised.

An earlier chapter prefigured the type of access that television might create, albeit on a national scale. It is entirely plausible to suggest that the funeral of Indira Gandhi was the first cremation that most women in Varanasi had ever seen, since (except in some Punjabi communities) they remain at home while men take the corpse to the burning *ghats*. What television effects in such circumstances is, in the words of Meyrowitz, a transformation of "the traditional relationship between physical location and access to social information" (1985: 61). It is no longer necessary to be somewhere to have access to what is happening there. On a more everyday basis, the news, views, sights, spectacles and festivals that are more easily available to men around the city are provided to women through television. This is particularly significant in an environment of seclusion, where social information is available in particular locations, access to which is controlled by gender. Women who were previously excluded from such physical and informational sites can participate in the

newly shaped public arena created by local television. Television of this nature denies the difference between public and private worlds.

The news and views sifted and collated by men in tea shops, although to some degree always shared, are now available to women at home. It is likely that when a man has not been to a far-off *mohalla* in the city that his wife will not have been there either. And, although a report on the local television news may reach both men and women, it is by women's reckoning at least, of greater significance that they have access to such things because "*gents log* (people) could go there anyway". Local television unhinges gender from the question of access, allowing contact with events that are either temporally, geographically or socially off-limits. As one woman described it: "Those places you cannot wander to, those places you can see sitting in the house". We might term this, after Williams (1974), the development of 'privatised mobility'.

When I asked the manager of Siti Cable about the impact of his services in the city he responded in a similar way. He acknowledged that "what today people are talking about, spreads to the cross-roads where people carry on discussing it. We [Siti Cable] carry it into the house and, because of this, people sitting at home receive a lot of information". There are obvious dangers in over-stretching the potential local television offers for women's participation. It would be unwise to suggest that women are granted, through coverage of such events or discussions on television, total access to such public (or male) sites and they are therefore participating in this sphere of activity on a par with men. However, their access to these events, its vicariousness notwithstanding, is viewed as a significant and much welcomed addition to their lives.

While, as I have shown, there are perceptions of crowds and public spaces which can be marked as those of women, negative evaluations of outside spaces might be viewed as more widely shared by some (but not all) men and women. Several male residents of Ravindrapuri colony noted how they did not go to *melas* or *lilas* because they did not like the crowds. And their thoughts on this were mirrored by others who said that they *only* went for their children. It is significant that cultural

transmission, rather than the fun of the event and its crowds, were the reason for going at all. Kumar, talking of one *mela* in particular but more generally of the *melas* today argues, “the ‘public’ crowds, and open gatherings are all negative concepts now, a reversal of the situation illustrated by the major *melas* of the past” (1988:135-6). However, it is possible to argue that in general perceptions of crowds have undergone some transformation, and following Kumar, that crowds and their participants are likely to be seen as lower class entities. It is therefore necessary to consider the relationship between television and ideas about the outside.

Crowds outside, televisions inside.

An early comment about television in *Aaj* offered a ‘serving suggestion’ for this domestic technology, which is particularly evocative in its construction of the outside as somewhere from which children need liberating, and its insinuation that the cinema is not worthy of the family’s time and money:

Only television saves the children of the house from wandering here and there. Only television gathers the family in one place and entertains them, saves them from the cinema queues (*Aaj* 25. viii. 84).

It seems clear that an account of television viewing must incorporate a sociology of the spaces in which it occurs. As an earlier chapter maintained, this should include the house, but also questions of urban space in general. Television viewing, as the prophetic comments in *Aaj* suggested, is an activity that does stop children ‘wandering here and there’, and for many families that tendency is something to be utilised. Television is also likely to gather the family in one place. The decline of cinema halls in the city, and the lobbying by the threatened film industry in the years since satellite arrived suggests, as *Aaj* had foretold, that watching films at home *en famille*, is less of a struggle than taking the family to a crowded picture hall. It can also be, although *Aaj* did not foretell this, substantially cheaper⁸.

⁸ The cheaper cinema halls in Varanasi e.g., the Abhay (Assi) charge Rs.10 per ticket, more expensive halls like the Vijaya (Bhelupura) or Tuxsal (Cant.) upwards of Rs.25-30. With transport and refreshments the cost of a household trip could easily exceed that of a monthly satellite connection.

Walking along the streets and alleys of Varanasi, people are accompanied by a range of sounds. One of the most consistent is the sound of television, and when many houses are watching the same programme progression through the alleys is marked by a continuous aural wallpaper. The occasional cries of children in reaction to what they are seeing or squabbles over what will be watched further add to this televisual soundscape.

Commentary on the popularity of the televised *Ramayana* (e.g., Lutgendorf 1995) is notable for its inclusion of one single, if rather transitory, effect. That is the sense that a curfew had been imposed on the cities and towns in which it was being watched. The empty roads, deserted shops and tea stalls stood as testament to the way in which this serial drew people around sets, provoking a contrast to the usual activity of the city. What these observations draw attention to is the impact that television can have on outside spaces, or put it another way, what outside spaces look like when people are inside watching television. This is not to suggest that television has created a televisual ghost town of Varanasi, far from it, but to point out that domestically orientated leisure activities draw people off streets into homes. Further it leads us to ask what meanings the domestic and public spheres may have in terms of leisure.

For the writer in *Aaj*, as for other families we meet in the next chapter, the fact that television can draw one's children closer to the house, and prevent them becoming *awaaras*⁹ (vagrants or wanderers), is something for which to be thankful. For older members of the family, there is reassurance that children can be accounted for. It is no longer necessary to guess where they might be and to conclude, embarrassingly, that they are in others' houses watching television. As Gita, a woman in Shivala made clear, her household's decision to take a cable connection, was one that involved more than increased programme choice:

We did not take our connection immediately. First it was in the houses of all our neighbours. The children would leave their schoolwork [unfinished] and go to these houses to watch it [cable]. I did not like it that they were in other peoples' houses watching cable television, especially because they had not done their work. 'Whose house are they in?', I would ask, 'Not mine'. After

⁹ This is itself a *filmi* allusion, being the title of a famous Raj Kapoor film.

that I said that I did not want the children going outside (*bahar*) and that they should stay in the house (*ghar me rehna chahiye*). So I went to a neighbour's house and watched it for three or four days, accepted it and took a connection.

Given the quite critical reaction that satellite television has elicited in Varanasi it is significant that a woman will readily take a cable connection rather than let her children wander the streets in the after-school hours. It is a remarkable statement of the meanings the outside can have for someone with teenage children. Her commentary is not just about 'the outside' but also about children and later chapters takes up the topic of children and television in more detail. Here it seems important to consider in more detail various perceptions of the outside, and this requires that we ground such ideas more clearly within the historical and cultural context of Varanasi and its spaces.

Reclaiming and rethinking city space.

Sudipta Kaviraj's (1996) analysis of how, in colonial and post-colonial Calcutta, the western distinction between public and private was mapped onto that between 'the home' (*ghar*) and 'the outside' (*bahar*), argues that these concepts have different meanings for various sections of Calcuttan society. The home "was a realm of security, stable and repeated relationships which did not usually contain surprises", the outside "was not a hospitable world. It was full of strangers, and consequent unpredictableness and threats of predation of all varieties" (ibid.: 46). He demonstrates how the Bengali middle class rose to the challenge of appropriating 'the public' as an arena in which political associations could be formed, older familial networks supplemented by personal friendships and "the prospects of self-making" (ibid.). What emerged, as the two sets of categories were mapped onto each other, was a reconfiguration; the production of "displacements" between the private/public and inside/outside distinctions.

Kaviraj then traces this complex conceptual genealogy through an urban space, the park. In the earliest stages of the development of the city the park represented, he

argues, the public as something opposed to the private house, and also a monument to civic culture. The parks, usually surrounded by middle class housing, were middle class spaces. Vendors of snacks were allowed to 'trespass' to service the needs of those who used them, and they were frequently the sites of neighbourhood festivals and cricket matches. The later massive expansion of population in Calcutta led to ever greater intrusions on these privately public spaces, and what emerges is the notion of a soiled public (ibid.: 55). Shops and stalls began to encircle the parks and they became more plebeian. Beautification and upkeep became less of a concern as the park became a "collective property of the poor" (ibid.: 58). Kaviraj then traces the trajectory of the idea of the outside as it met with that of the public, and how the concept of public subsequently underwent transformation as it became less civic and more 'public' i.e., peopled by the mass. What his essay lacks is an examination of the concepts of 'private' and 'home' as the idea and nature of the public/outside changed. By tracing the progress of an anti-encroachment campaign that was launched in the city by the Municipal authority and by thinking about aspects of daily practice this lacuna can be filled.

Aaj reported in November 1997 that "in the city these days in every alley and street corner there is only one topic of discussion (*charcha*): "In which area will encroachments be removed today or in which areas were encroachments removed yesterday?" (7. xi). The chief city official had launched an anti-encroachment campaign (*atikraman hatao abhiyan*) with two key objectives: to remove encroaching structures from public space and begin a cleaning or beautification drive. The public, shopkeepers and householders, were enjoined to remove any part of their buildings which they knew to be encroachments. They were warned that if they failed to take action themselves then corporation workers, and heavy machinery, would do the work for them. Some substantial buildings were pulled down, vendors in *gumtis* (wooden stalls) were moved away, steps linking shops to the street removed and in the colonies walls removed and gardens reclaimed. Public space, which had become private through its appropriation in the construction of houses, shops and gardens was repossessed.

Over the following weeks¹⁰, as reports in *Aaj* attested, the campaign was almost the only topic being discussed in the city. Playing on the similarity of the official's name, Har Dev Singh and the Banarsi slogan of praise for Shiva, *Har Har Maha Dev*, these cries could be heard all over the city: "*Har Har Har Dev Singh*". The papers and the populace both agreed that something rather fundamental was occurring. People could be seen, both day and night, cleaning the gutters/drains (*nali*) running past their shops, or supervising workers who were pulling down parts of their buildings that encroached. They were even cleaning out their own drains, a job usually carried out by Harijan sweepers.

Chay shops, stalls, and other landmarks simply disappeared overnight. The landscape of the city was transformed. People commented that roads had almost doubled in width, others "seeing after many years that there were indeed drains lining the street were surprised: arrey, there was a drain here!" (*Dainik Jagran* 8. xi. 97). The city, some said, had become like Paris, others were reminded of London. Writers to the local press congratulated the official on giving birth to a civic culture. Others recommended further improvements that could be made at a city or local level. Furious debate raged, aligned along political and economic axes: where would it stop, was it fair to the poor, what about Luxa police station which was an encroachment, how would erstwhile stall holders make their living (*roz roth*)?

The campaign to both remove encroachments and clean up the city was launched as one of necessity. Roads which were clogged by stalls, protruding shops and houses and their steps had to be cleared, the administration argued, as a matter of hygiene and efficiency. However, the immediate product of this triumphantly civic campaign, as the widespread and hot discussion (*garam charcha*) indicated, was much more complex. By compelling residents of Varanasi to give back to the city the space which they had sequestered, and to refrain from throwing rubbish onto the street, the campaign was obliging people to reconceptualise the distinction between home and outside, of public and private. It was asking people to see the outside as both their

¹⁰The anti-encroachment drive was still in operation, and very much in evidence in December 1998, although it was widely accepted that it was running on a low level of political support.

own and public property. The 'governmentality' of the Municipal Corporation (MC) confronted, often quite brutally, a variety of views about the nature of public and private space in Varanasi.

Although this campaign was primarily focused on clearing away encroachments on public space, it connects with ideas about a soiled public and the masses towards which this chapter has progressed. Attention to the anti-encroachment drive can help us crystallise some aspects of the complex, ambiguous and contradictory ideas about the outside in Varanasi that it threw out. There were some who, in the face of the MC campaign, denied that filth was a problem in the city. For others, the campaign was welcomed as a belated attempt to inspire civic responsibility. Some areas of the city had more to gain or lose than others from the inexhaustible Har Dev Singh. Residents in Ravindrapuri colony were aghast to lose their gardens, others feared that they would lose their livelihoods.

The Municipal view, supported by some householders, that the streets of Varanasi had become clogged up by illicit buildings was a reflection of a perception that the outside was clogged by people, and a particular type of people. Clearly ideas about rubbish on the streets, and the nature of crowds, vary among different sections of the city's population. For some, as Kumar suggests, the throwing onto the street of rubbish, and the general filth this precipitates, is "beyond any considerations of stench and garbage" (1988: 243). Similarly, for some the crowds that the festivals and celebrations of the city precipitate are part of the glory and attraction of such events. Conversely, for those who supported the anti-encroachment campaign, rubbish on the streets and the masses who people the public spaces of the city could be equated. A man in Shivala had written on his wall "Please don't throw rubbish here. Those who throw rubbish are dogs", and this request and proclamation accords with the views of those who saw the men on the streets in similar terms, as half-breeds or bastards (*dogla*).

On the basis of my experiences working with aspirant or middle class families, and following Kumar (1988), I have suggested that the perception of crowds as rowdy, rough and in some sense the undesirable feature of many events, is one that is quite

strongly felt. I have been concerned to link this perception to the televising of events in Varanasi in two ways. The first is that for women especially, but for others as well, local television can offer novel access to events which might otherwise have gone unseen. It also provides access within the home and thereby removes the need for physical participation in events. In another way, I have suggested that events which are decreasing in size are granted a new sense of publicness through their televising. Both these ideas are clearly related to ideas about the outside as a space and a category and inform peoples' perceptions of leisure in the city in the age of television.

Kaviraj is correct to point to the relationship between ideas about the home and the outside, although he leaves the home out of his analysis. The focus on houses and gardens which was central to the anti-encroachment campaign suggests that attention to either sphere must be complemented by a discussion of the other. The sequestered city space which the MC campaign sought to reclaim reiterates several points made during the course of the previous chapter, one is the scarcity of land and its importance for maintaining a living. Secondly, where houses and gardens were on 'public' space, these were not only taking something that was not theirs, (which was the view underpinning the MC action) but making more resolute statements about their need for a increased private space. These statements are intimately related to ideas about the outside and cannot be separated from them. The growing domestication of leisure, the viewing of films in the comfort of the home, and vicarious participation in city events through local television, are a reflection of ideas about both the home and the outside.

One resident of Ravindrapuri colony, whose garden was being removed, offered Har Dev Singh a bribe of Rs.150,000 to desist, such was the price he was willing to pay to maintain his increased private space. Friends, whose resources were far more meagre, revelled in Har Dev's reply: "Pay someone Rs.50,000 to shoot me and save yourself Rs.100,000 (a *lakh*)". In the increasingly "violent, disorderly and uncomfortable" (Breckenridge and Appadurai 1996: 10) city, those who can, attempt to find a place which is their own, and in which they can find 'ontological' and

physical security (Giddens 1990). This is one of the contexts of the following chapter, which focuses on houses and homes.

Har Dev Singh, with whom I spoke as I took my final train out of the city, concurred with many others who had expressed the opinion that ‘something had to be done’. In other words, the growing disorderliness of the city had rendered it dysfunctional and unattractive. This was a view which indicated that so many notions about what was private and what was public were attempting to coexist that some administrative dictate was required to clarify, at least in municipal terms, what was what.

That “in the alleys and street corners of the city” such a diverse range of perspectives on the anti-encroachment campaign could be found was indicative of the fact that the outside was where these debate were being conducted. The nature of the public sphere of Varanasi was being debated in the public sphere. However, viewing the campaign’s progress on local television with people and the discussions I had about it with householders, confirmed the sense that what may begin outside the house finds its way, through electronic or other media, into the house. Just as the *atikraman hatao abhiyan* had sought to clarify the issue of private and public, so the debates around it pointed up the indivisibility, in spatial and informational senses, of the private and public spheres.

Conclusions

This chapter has sketched out the ways in which the worlds of men and women are both discrete and complementary, and how media inform or transform this relationship. What emerges are different perspectives on it that mirror the social and geographical landscape of their adherents. The idiom of perspectives is a suitably visual and spatial one to employ, and stresses the simple but important point that “things look different depending on where you see them from” (Hannerz 1992: 65).

We have seen how, in the tea shops, perspectives are all important. Customers offer, debate, re-examine and reform their own and others’ perspectives. What local

television provides, to continue the image, is an amplification of the perspectives and the ability to see them through another medium at social and geographical distance from where they are generated. In this sense, what I have described is a localised version of what many commentators, particularly Meyrowitz (1985) and those more concerned^{ed} with television and globalisation have argued: television provides a new doorway into the house, it is a purveyor of elsewheres. By drawing on an extreme example of such transformations in access to events outside the home, the funeral of Indira Gandhi, as well as more daily events in the city, I have illustrated that from a national and local perspective, television can substantially alter the nature of participation which might be otherwise controlled by factors such as gender. Tea shops have a 'world disclosing role' in which the activities of men are crucial. Local television builds on and informs the activities of these communicative sites and allows for the disclosure of world to the home and thereby increases the participation of women in a notionally male public sphere.

This chapter has illustrated some of the processes and their implications when the 'elsewhere' is in the city; somewhere to which gender or social identity restricts access. This is not to argue that women, or indeed any others who now enjoy local television in Varanasi, were ever totally lacking in the information or knowledge that Siti Cable and CTV now provide. Where links to it were more attenuated, television now transmits of knowledge beyond the contexts in which it is generated. In light of Rosaldo's (1974) argument that women's status is lowest when the domestic and public sphere is strongly differentiated, it could be suggested that in as far as local television has further eroded such a distinction, the women in Varanasi I spoke with have good grounds for welcoming the introduction of local television.

By drawing on an event which was intimately connected to ideas about the home and outside, which consumed the public assembled in the tea shops and reached home through local television, I have argued for the necessity of approaching the sphere of home and outside through appreciation of both categories. Although the anti-encroachment campaign was directly concerned with rubbish on the streets and buildings standing on 'public' space, I have argued that parallels can be drawn between ideas about these encroachments and householders attitudes to the world

beyond their door. Television, particularly when it is local, has been to shown to provide resources for shifts in ideas about the home and outside. The next chapter, which concentrates on the domestic sphere, builds on these insights and prepares the way for attention to television viewing within the house.

CHAPTER SIX

Locating the domestic sphere

A husband and wife are sitting on a beach. The wife is complaining about the size of their house and the trouble that this causes her. "I never thought we would have to buy a new house", she concludes.

"Don't worry about it", a voice booms.

"In the centre of Varanasi: the ultra-modern,
multi-storeyed *Guru Kripa*
commercial-cum-residential complex

Main attractions are:

Supermarket, 24 hour water, Deluxe 2 or 3
bedroom flat. Telephone point and master
television antennae. White marble and mosaic
flooring in every flat
In Sonarpura, Varanasi".

[An advertisement from the local Siti channel].

Introduction

Emerging on one of the few remaining spaces on the road from Godaulia to BHU, this commercial-cum-residential complex typifies the trends in housing, and the cultures they support, that was the focus of chapter three. Since this complex was uninhabited and, save lethargic builders, devoid of life, it cannot form more than the opening vignette of this chapter. Because I lived quite close to this building work I was aware of its presence, but its marketing on local television, sandwiched between commercials for shops selling soft-furnishing for the home, clearly expressed various aspects of 'the house' with which this chapter is concerned. Here was a residential block offering the marble floors that many families I met coveted, telephone and television connections and a handy on-site supermarket. In other words, the *Guru*

Kripa complex offered communications, comfort, and commercial facilities. However, to satisfy those like the woman in the advertisement, it also offered more space for an expanding family who had out-grown their home.

These are some of the themes on which this chapter will enlarge, by seeking to relate household structure, and interior decoration and organisation, to television (as an object and a medium). As this advertisement suggests, television is implicated in various ways with homes and domesticity: it brings the world into the home, it offers viewers endless pictures of other homes and it is supported by advertisements which are framed around a narrative of domesticity. In another sense the house, through its inhabitation, becomes a home, its members and their relationships shape the space of their surroundings and television plays an active role in such relationships. In short, what is the connection between the social organisation of a house, its spaces, and its members? How does television inform the relationships between members of a household? To the extent that these questions relate to the home, and the outside, this chapter acts as a bridge between those that preceded it and those that follow it.

One of the family homes considered in this chapter was rebuilt due to constraints of space similar to those expressed by the women in the advert. Another is spacious enough for the purposes of those that live in it, and the third is a rather more temporary home all together. The homes of three families, from various points in the social scale, are described in varying amounts of detail in order to draw out these themes. No claim is made that these families are necessarily representative within any class, nor that they illustrate the homes of the city from top to bottom, new and old. There are significant differences and similarities between them, but taken together they provide a suitably broad range of living circumstances and the social and economic relations that inform them.

Only one of the families is a joint family in the sense that I am using that term (see below) and more time is spent illustrating and discussing this family house and its inhabitants than those of the others. This is because the following chapters will go on to say much more about the joint family and its uses of television, and some preliminary introduction is required. Furthermore, the developmental cycle of this

family and the relations between its members were a crucial factor in the rebuilding and fashioning of their dwelling. An understanding of the social and economic aspects of the developmental cycle of the family is important in considering how people shape and use the spaces in which they live.

The last chapter began with the admission that I found access to homes quite difficult to secure in the early stages of my fieldwork. My expectation had been that television ownership levels would be quite low, and therefore that patterns of access between houses and among neighbours might be quite fluid. However, it quickly became apparent that televisions were relatively cheap and ownership quite common across a wide social spectrum. The result, as critics of television were apt to point out, was that life had become 'home' centred or house-bound, with people rarely going out.

This chapter is not concerned with the claims that television lead to the decline of sociality. It is, however, interested in the social life of homes and keen to think about the house and home-building strategies in the light of television, for in some sense these strategies are refracted through television. The television screen is one place in which the world is brought inside but this world is, very often, a domestic one. The most popular genre of programming encountered was family serials (whether comic, tragic or serious) in which the family house was the main arena of action. In many of these serials, the outside is not itself encountered, but if it is it remains an anonymous foil to the main centre of action: the domestic sphere.

Television commercials, whether encouraging people to move into the "ultra-modern" complex cited above, or advising on matters of decoration or maintenance are predominantly domestic in tone. Television is a singularly important disseminator of images of domesticity (Haravolich 1988; Spigel 1990; 1992), which in light of its predominantly domestic mode of consumption is the starting point of this chapter. This is not to suggest that what follows will illustrate a process of mimesis in which the television guides all things domestic. Rather my intention is to stress that television, as a household object and as a medium, is enmeshed within the spaces and social relations of the domestic sphere. This

relationship can be historically located in terms of the institutions of television and the on-going developmental cycle of the household.

The home in the world: some domestic spheres

None of the houses described below ^{has} ~~have~~ marble flooring (with mosaic inlay) but one has a 24 hour water supply, telephone and, from the point of view of the inhabitants of the others, would be considered not only spacious but deluxe. The Das' home is indeed both of these, but the time that Dr Das spent on minor and major home improvements suggests that, in his mind, there was room for improvement.

The Das family, of Bengali origin but long resident in the city, live in Shivala, a quarter of the city reputed for its high density of Bengali speakers. The family head, Dr Das, makes a comfortable living as a medical officer in one of the universities in the city. He sends his twin daughters to an exclusive English-medium convent school and ensures that they spend their free time constructively, particularly with arts and crafts activities. His wife, having recently given birth to a son, spends most of her days indoors, though she took to jogging around the courtyard, perhaps inspired by the early morning health shows on television and frequent discussions about weight-loss with her friends.

Dr Das was my landlord for a year during fieldwork and I lived on the ground floor of their house. Although social interaction was fairly limited, I became accustomed to hearing the background sounds of television from upstairs blending in with the sounds of the everyday and assumed some familiarity with the organisation of space upstairs.

Their sitting room, always referred to as the 'drawing room', is centred towards a wall with a glass-fronted set of built-in shelves, the focus of which is a Phillips television and video player. In addition to these focal items the vitrine contains many *objets d'art*; a collection of miniature liqueur bottles collected on trips overseas, an ensemble of cuddly toys made by the twins and their father including Snoopy,

Goofy and Mickey Mouse. Greco-Roman alabaster figures and several photographs complete this medley of decorative items. The room is decorated by various pictures and by the appliqué work characteristic of Rajasthan. These are the sort of items detailed by Greenough (1996) in his discussion of arts, crafts and displayed tradition. His account is centred on repertoires of ‘national’ art, though a comment by Mrs Das suggests that there are other sources of decorative influence. Seeing the interior of a house in a serial on Zee TV, she exclaimed with joy, that the family in this serial “have got the same cushion covers as us”.

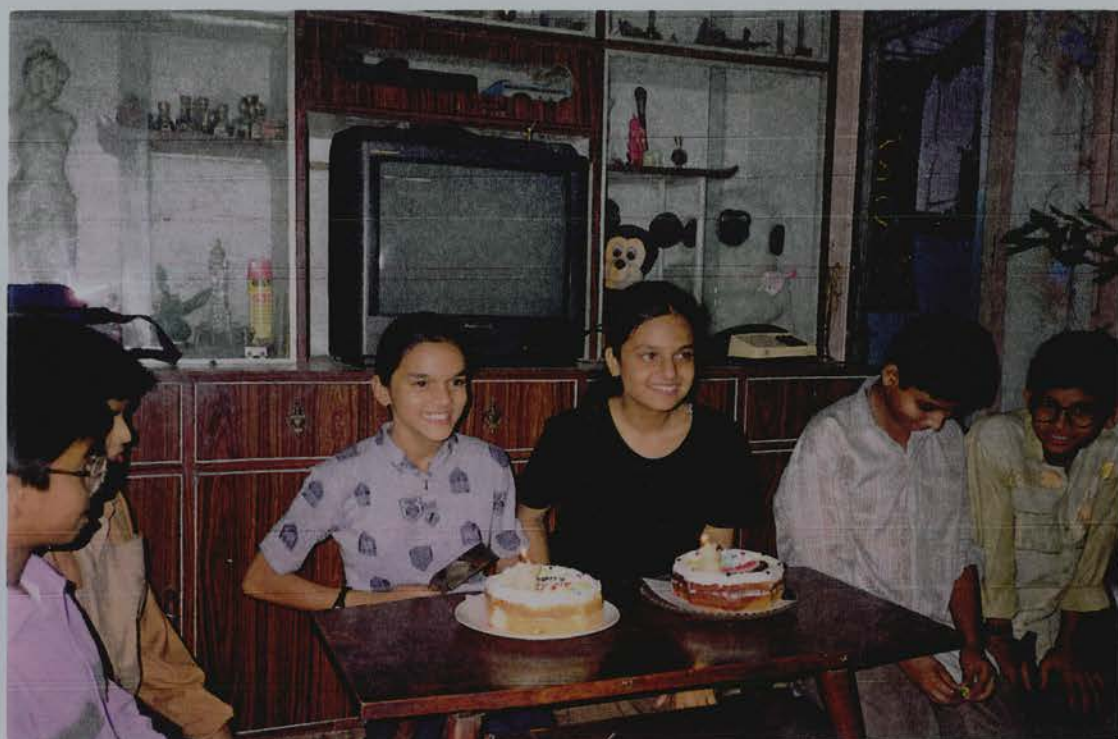


Plate 6: 1. Birthday celebrations in the Das' drawing room.

It is in this room that the family did the majority of their entertaining, whoever their guests might be. It was here that they had constructed a carefully managed image of their family, and its standing in relation to society. Meals were sometimes taken in a small room maintained for just this purpose. Unusually and rather confusingly, knives and forks were provided. However, my experience of eating with them was one in which the television always impinged. It was never turned off, and as Dr Das sat controlling what came into the drawing room, guests would have to battle to

make their contributions more engaging than those of Zee TV. It seemed to me that this situation was based on an understanding that a television represents the ultimate in decorative and social heights.

Given that I occupied the ground floor and had the use of a door that opened onto the street I inhabited the section of the house that was most closely linked to the neighbourhood outside. The Das' living area was accessible from the courtyard only and the door which led to the staircase upstairs was controlled remotely by a string. Visitors rang a musical door bell and, once the callers had been identified, a pull on the string opened the door. The division between outside and interior spaces was thereby policed quite effectively. This family, like so many others in a similar social position, would often cast aspersions on people on the street. They feared that the twins would be distracted from their studies and lose the polished Hindi and English that their exclusive and expensive education was imparting. Their linguistic register might become contaminated by Bhojpuri, the local dialect. A small garden enabled them to play without leaving the precinct of the home, beyond the security of their parents' gaze.

Another family I grew to know was Mangal's. He represents for many more middle class and aspirant families, like the Das', the sort of people that make the outside a threatening and unsavoury place. It often appeared that people in this socially marginal and downtrodden position acted as 'paradigmatic scum' in the city, a group against which the 'morally superior' could judge themselves and from whom children should be shielded.

I had known Mangal for several months when I saw his family moving with all their belongings on a rickshaw. Problems with the landlord and rent, were forcing him to return to his parents' two rooms. Mangal and his family of five are of *Mallah* caste (fisherfolk and boatmen) though Mangal has been employed as a *chay* maker or as a rickshaw puller. His father and mother have lived in Varanasi since 1973, nearly fifteen years longer than him and it was his landless and 'futureless' existence in a village near Calcutta that precipitated his arrival in the city. His mother tongue is Bengali and his knowledge of Hindi quite limited. A majority of rickshaw pullers

in Varanasi have migrated into the city from outlying regions and tend to group, like their home-owning regional counterparts, on a regional basis.

Mangal's family stayed at his parents *pro tem* when landlords did not oblige with extra time to pay the rent and their two rooms were stretched when they moved in. His parents had imposed greater decorative order on their more permanent abode. Fading pictures of their parents posing in a Calcutta studio hang alongside images of the Hindu pantheon. Apart from these photos and 'God poster' art, the remainder of their possessions are packed away, methodically stored in plastic bags, wrapped in paper, and sealed in pots under the bed in tin trunks.

Hanging clothes was the extent of decoration in Mangal's rooms. He had a supply of plastic sheeting, used for flooring or to secure a leaking roof, to which loose sackings were added. Two metal trunks, a selection of cooking equipment and his black and white television and fan were the sum total of his material possessions. The makeshift nature of his dwellings meant that, as at his parents' house, storage and preservation came before aesthetic embellishment and display. There were no glass-fronted cabinets with plastic elephants or models of famous Indian landmarks, no Rajasthani cushion covers in this dwelling.



Plate 6: 2. Mangal's house, his mother is cooking.



Plate 6: 3. Mangal's mother's home.

More comfortable families often expressed surprise, bordering on disdain, that people like Mangal owned a television set. It appeared to devalue the status of their own set. More specifically, to them it suggested the misplaced priorities of the lower class who bought a television when they had little to live on and meagre resources for educating their children let alone feeding them. What is pertinent is that the rationale Mangal employed for the purchase of a set mirrored that of this disparaging 'middling sort' (Freitag 1989b: 178). Mangal had grown tired of feeling a 'pinch in his heart' (*dil me kachot aata raha*) when his children complained that they did not have a television, and that they had been chased away from houses where they were trying to 'steal a look' (*dekh lutna*). He had felt a sense of shame, or embarrassment and vowed to buy one. He persuaded a local hotel owner to part with an old set, and paid the amount off over a number of months. When a set was installed, he was glad that he could now guarantee that his children would remain at home, and that they would roam around the neighbourhood less than they had.

As Ossman points out (1994: 57) the television in such lowly settings is one thing that is owned when everything else is shared. Televisions can afford an element of privacy in living conditions where there is little demarcation of space, and can create a space which is one's own. Keeping the volume of the television turned up high, the proximity of other families (with whom arguments were common) could be negated. Whether the door was open, or a cloth hung in the frame, the television seemed to secure a private space. Enquiring faces, be they old or young, were not always encouraged.

These two families do not represent two social extremes in Varanasi. There are families both richer and poorer. Another friend and his family, of the same caste, knew of my friendship with Mangal and sought to draw social distance from him and his penniless existence. The rebuilding of their home inscribed this difference between the two families but, as Keshav was keen to remind me, their fortunes had not always been so comfortable. Although he was able to confidently assert that his family was "moving forward" (*aage ja rahe rahe*), this had not always been the case.

The joint family and aspects of living together

Keshav Sahni is one of four brothers. His two younger brothers, Munna and Bharat are unmarried. He has a son, his elder brother, Harsi, four children. Keshav's four sisters are married, although one has returned to her *pihar* or *mayka* (natal home) on a semi-permanent basis because of trouble in her marital home.

The household has had a relationship for several generations with an important family living on the river near the *ghat* where they moor their boats, and they act as boatmen to this family. However, the majority of their income is generated by running boat trips down the Ganga for tourists and pilgrims. Bharat, the youngest brother, runs a tea stall at the *ghat*, and the women of the household occasionally contribute to the family purse by selling miscellanea at festivals. In a financial, and other ~~other~~ senses, the family is joint; money is pooled and dispensed by Keshav's parents. Which is not to say that money is not a source of friction.

According to Keshav's father, disagreement over money, however disagreeable it may be, has one advantage: it presupposes that there is some money over which to squabble. In what is an indication of the importance of looking at household life in a processual way, Keshav's father explained that after the death of his own father he was the only breadwinner in a newly partitioned family. He shared the house with his younger brother and divided out other resources. But since his sons were still unable to earn a wage he was the sole provider. Years later, during my fieldwork, he did not feel confident enough to say, like Keshav, that the family was "moving forward" but he was more relaxed about their prospects.

Seen from a short- or long-term perspective the development of the Sahni household, and the views of some members about it, found expression through the rebuilding of their home. The building work reflected the needs of the household as it grew in size and the brothers began to get married. Therefore, the building work was about the family as it was in the present and would be in the future. But for Keshav, the rebuilding provided a canvas, both literal and metaphorical, onto which he could project some of his ideas about the joint family and his place within it. The demolition of the Sahni home and its reconstruction captures several aspects of joint family life and provides a space in which a discussion of this institution can be framed.

There is a strong and all-pervading sense that a 'proper family' is a joint family, that is, one that consists of more than a husband, wife and children. Men and women from very different social backgrounds talked of the importance of sons living with their parents and of authority in the household being vested in the senior male and female. The coexistence of parents and their sons was often contrasted with the British habit of consigning ageing parents to an old peoples' home. Underlying the practical organisation and ideology of the Indian joint family are notions of respect, obedience, sharedness and filial piety. The practical and ideological aspects of the joint family clearly guide each other. Practically, joint living is considered the most appropriate and secure way to live. Ideologically, the joint family has immense importance as a symbol of India and its cultural distinctiveness and endurance. In any range of discussions about what makes India what it is (i.e., 'great' or 'strong') the

joint family is almost certain to feature. Conversely, discussions of social change and degeneration are likely to include a reference to the faltering family system. However, on a daily basis, the practical experience of joint family living may differ substantially from what the ideology might suggest.

For Keshav, obedience and utmost respect for his parents was summed up in an oft-repeated expression: "Obey your parents, then obey God", in which 'obey' was often substituted by 'worship'. For the younger members of a joint family, with or without a degree of resistance, submission to seniors (by age or generation), is an accepted part of daily life. Keshav knew that his father's reputation was far from shining. His drink habit was well known locally and resulted in criticism of the family. However, his elder brother Harsi was a big drinker too and it is around this habit that issues of respect, obedience and financial contributions to the household purse came into relief. This drinking caused Keshav to question the practice and ideology of the joint family, and drew a response that accented his conjugal bonds.

Given Keshav's comments about the need to respect one's parents it is unsurprising that he made only the softest of criticism about his father's habit. His most stringent criticisms were directed at Harsi, with whom he had quite a strained relationship. Parry (1979: 161) notes that the relationship between elder and younger son is highly asymmetrical. In my experience this may be so, although it was rarely as obviously unequal and tense as in this family. For Keshav, the primary result of Harsi's drinking was the stark differentials in what each brother contributed to the family purse. What Harsi earned seemed to go on drink, and after drinking he slept under the nearest tree. His lack of participation in providing for the family (and four of the five young children were his) led to serious rows and sometimes violence. As Keshav saw it, there was nothing joint about the contributions when his youngest brother often put into the family purse far larger amounts than Harsi.

This scenario drove home to Keshav that the things he aspired to provide for his son were contingent on the grace of his entire family. Keshav was determined to send his son to an English medium school, to help him acquire government or private 'service'. He was adamant that his son would not be a boatman like himself but a

Police Inspector or clerk. However, he always added to such a blueprint for the future that there was little hope of saving the money required when he had to carry the entire family on his shoulders.

People try to see the good of the joint family as coterminous with their own interests, but Keshav often questioned whether, in his joint family, this was the case. His frequent polemics about aspects of his joint family life highlight a general tension between, in the terminology of Rousseau, the general will and the will of all. The former, which considers only the common interest and the latter, which is the sum of private interests, strikes at the heart of what many see as an undeniable tension in joint family life. The ideology of the joint family stresses a general will, but practically there are tensions between conflicting claims to resources or authority. What marks the joint family as of such importance is this relationship between the ideological pre-eminence of the idea of a common good and the practical reality of individual interests.

For Keshav, as for so many others, the joint family has an undeniable logic. As a living strategy it is, as one money-minded bank clerk put it, “an insurance policy against unemployment, poverty and hunger”. As an ideology, whatever problems are experienced at a practical level, it is seen as the only way family members can each fulfil their potential and secure the well being of all. So it might be said that whilst the joint family provides security, company and interdependence it also entails a corresponding lack of autonomy, space and privacy.

This begs the question, what is meant by the term ‘joint family’. Given the strength of the institution as a cultural ideal and the considerable definitional debates amongst scholars, it can be said that the symbolic meaning is somewhat clearer than that of the definition. Shah views “residential unity of patrikin and their wives” as the axiomatic principle of the joint family (1974: 16). Here the stress is clearly on residence, but from the perspective of Varanasi my experience was that males who had strong links with their extended family in villages, especially those that owned property in their ancestral village, were apt to include themselves within this wider, though geographically dispersed entity. Clearly, as Parry argues, the joint family as a

property-holding group is different from a joint household as a residential group which uses a single hearth (*chulha*), pools income and shares other living expenses (1979: 156). The Gupta brothers, whose acrimonious partition had dragged through the courts for years, had divided their house, quite literally, down the middle, and a new flight of stairs granted separate access to each side of the house. Although contact between the two brothers was limited, children watching television 'next door' acted as go-betweens. According to Shah's definition they might be viewed as a joint, if rather attenuated, family. After years of legal dispute the brothers would not have agreed with such a label.

However, another joint family stressed that they were joint (*sanyukt*), but kept their incomes separate and all the brothers and their offspring ate food prepared by their own wives. Joint in their sense meant residential unity of brothers and shared responsibility for their widowed mother. Close by, a household of four brothers constituted, by their reckoning, a joint family but beyond operating as a commensal unit they kept their lives spatially and financially independent. A common statement about the joint family, which again indicates the tenacity of the ideal in the face of practical circumstances, was the suggestion that a family remains joint even though employment requires sons to live away from the family home. Sometimes, the wives and offspring of these temporary economic migrants remained at their husband's home, others moved away with their husbands. The ideal was not seen as compromised nor was the situation seen as permanent. All these families were keen to stress that they lived as a joint family though if we are to follow a single definition not all would be so classified. The ideological pre-eminence of the joint family, as standard or ideal, results in most families *claiming* that theirs is a joint family.

If a joint family need not imply commensality, a single hearth, co-residence of brothers or pooled financial resources how might we distinguish this institution in a practical sense? Shah's formulation about "residential unity of patrikin" is, to my mind, a good place to start. Added to this might be the idea that the joint family stretches over three generations (cf. Madan 1993: 421). The former indicates that we are not dealing with a nuclear (or elementary) family (cf. Shah 1974: 107) since brothers and their wives are co-resident. The idea of three generations, although

three generations are clearly possible within what might be called an elementary family, is important because it links to ideas about the nature of life in the family (cultural transmission, education, filial piety, and edification through *sanskaras*) which are seen as crucial aspects of living together. It also leads us to see the household in terms of its developmental cycle (Fortes 1958).

When Keshav's grandfather died, a three-generation house of two brothers, their wives and children, who had pooled income and acted as a commensal unit within a single house, partitioned. The house was physically divided, separate hearths (*chulha*) established and the two units each became two generation households. It is a moot point whether these brothers still referred to their living circumstances as joint in any sense since there was considerable tension between them. However, within a matter of years Harsi and Keshav were married and had children. Three generations were co-present within a single household and residential unity of patrikin was restored.

Therefore families observed within the time frame of a single period of fieldwork can appear to be elementary or joint. But from a diachronic perspective they are moving through phases of "expansions, dispersion and replacement" (Fortes 1958: 4). Several families I knew could be categorised as joint, but at a later date would be elementary, or *vice versa*. Two points should be made in this regard. Whatever the definition of joint family employed, and its primacy in ideas about how families should live together, it is generally accepted that it does not remain joint forever. As Madan puts it: "the partition of a complex household with two or more brothers in the senior generation is as much a fact of Hindu society as the existence of the cultural ideal of the so-called large joint family" (1993: 421) and Parry makes a very similar point (1979: 178). What neither stresses is whatever the size and structure of the joint family at one point in time, be it in a stage of dispersion or replacement, the ideology endures. The second, related point, is that given this ideological pre-eminence, we need to remain flexible in the question of definition.

One further approach to this definitional problem, suggested by Desai (in Madan 1993: 430), is to consider jointness in terms of daily practice and activities be these culinary, financial, administrative or televisual. Certainly an approach which

employs relatively fluid indices of jointness does not allow for strict classification of household types such as that prepared by Parry (1979). However, it does enable a qualitative approach to novel definitions and forces implicated in peoples' conceptualisations of the joint family. For the purposes of this work this seems important, for as Gita Srivastav (whom we meet below) put it: "Nowadays the joint family has come to mean those people that sit down in front of a television". Drawing some parallels and contrasts between the *chulha* and the television(s) we will see in the following chapters that ideas about the joint family and television have an interesting relationship. What might also be considered is the importance of household space in the production, or evaluation of jointness, and it is to the rebuilding of the Sahni home that we return.

Rebuilding a home

The rebuilding of Keshav's side of the house which had been physically partitioned by his father and *chacha* (FyB) was an expression of the phases of replacement and expansion of his family. As Keshav and Harsi had children, and their younger brothers both reached marriageable age, there were increasing demands for space. The new house not only reflected this increase in family size but also its structure (i.e., more conjugal units). From Keshav's perspective it also gave expression to the inter-family tensions that he so keenly felt.

The old home had been two storeys and a largely unsegregated space. The ground floor had consisted of two rooms: one a kitchen, the other a general family room for sleeping, eating and daily living. A bamboo ladder led upstairs to a roof terrace, partially covered from the sun. The work was done by all the brothers, three hired labourers and some affinal kin offered consultative assistance. The new house rose to a great height, providing a ground, first and roof-top second floor. This upper level will itself be built on to provide further room when the younger sons are married and resources allow.

The obvious contrast between this new building, and that which it replaced, was of more highly segregated space, which was organised around a central light giving shaft (*roshandan*) and the provision of separate bedrooms. On the ground floor, the front room became the parents' room, the back room that of Bharat and Munna. On the first floor, Keshav and his brother took the back and front rooms respectively, and the stairs led to the roof and kitchen. Two aspects of the house, both indicative of a certain privatisation were pointed out. The first was the two latrines. Defecation is a topic widely discussed by men and the pleasures of performing this bodily function outside form a major aspect of local discourse (Kumar 1988: 89): Keshav would often say that a Banarsi needs one square kilometre to relieve himself satisfactorily. After a year of having latrines, Keshav said that it was the women of the house who most appreciated this innovation but that the men were happier going outside (*bahar*). Secondly, the space which each married brother received, or would receive was pointed out. Keshav represented this in terms of segregation, (*sab alag ho gaya*, it's all become separate), because his new room would allow him a space in which to define a part of the house in contradistinction to that which he had to share with his elder brother.

The family moved back into the house long before the insides were finished. Money had run dry quicker than anticipated and internal decoration was put on hold. One ceremony, ostensibly a birthday party for Keshav's son, Ajay, was held soon after which marked its completion. A rendition of Happy Birthday was followed by the popping of balloons. Loud music blared out around the neighbourhood and fortified by Old Monk rum we went outside to dance in the street. The façade of the house had been decorated in fairy lights and neighbours gathered to watch the proceedings. They were invited to comment on the new house and enjoined to dance.

This 'topping-off' ceremony presented the house of a family "going forward" to the local neighbourhood. However, it was the presentation of the internal space to me by Keshav that seemed more significant. Whilst space for the entire family had been the prime incentive behind the reconstruction of the house, Keshav's comments on the result of the building work reflected his own ideas about why it had been

necessary and what he had gained from it. Conflict had necessitated it, conjugality would benefit from it.

As Keshav showed me around a room that was still to be plastered and contained just the barest decoration, he listed on his hand the objects and accessories that he would need to complete the room. First, he wanted some new curtains that would hang in the window facing Harsi's room. Secondly, he expressed the need for a cooler (a rudimentary air-conditioning unit) even though he did not have a ceiling, or even a table fan. Finally, and most significantly, for a member of a household that did not own a television, he said he wanted his own set. He added, by way of explanation: "The Pandey family [next door] have four sons and five televisions". This wish list of decorations and objects marked his desire to create a room that his wife and he could truly make their own. It would signify not only his distinction from the rest of the family but would objectify his productive labours (Gell 1986: 115), which he saw (with some justification) as greater than those of other family members. Although his consumption desires were of a 'middling sort' and drew on his knowledge of other houses and bedrooms, seen in friends' houses and on television, they were not just about aspirations but achievements (*ibid.*).

The room clearly meant something important to Keshav. The drinking issue which brought financial matters, and thus jointness to the fore, was reframed in terms of space apart from his brother. The space was then seen in terms of conjugality. This stress on conjugality was both an emotional and financial concern: the space could be inscribed (through personal decoration) as one for him and his wife, in which their interests could be distinguished from those of the remainder of the family. The new room expressed quite physically, the discontinuity between conjugality and jointness. The conjugal television, as we shall see in a later chapter, would be one object that could express even more clearly a space for the enhancement of conjugal bonds.



Plate 6: 4. Keshav, Rita and Ajay in their bedroom.

Kesav's oft-repeated desire to have a honeymoon in a hill station may be construed, like his rather unusual references to his love for his wife, as *filmi* influence laid bare for the benefit of a foreign friend. However, I would suggest that his comments about the need to define his room in distinction to those of the family, and his desire to re-enact the celebration of their marriage in a romantic hill station, indicate an emergent tendency to stress conjugality. As one observer has put it: "there is one change in interpersonal relations within the family predicted by the 'modernization' model which does appear to be confirmed empirically...this is a new and more positive value given to the conjugal relationship, and to the idea of conjugal 'love'" (Uberoi 1993: 392). What his new room allowed him to do was express this more powerfully than had ever been possible before. In sum, the Sahni's new house

expressed the developmental cycle of the family, relations between its members and increasing socio-economic stability. Their new home was a restatement of their changing relation to society.

Home and society

The home is an image...of the household and of the household's relation to society
(Hayden, cited in Haravolich 1988: 43).

A birthday party¹ for Dr Das' twin daughters provided a window onto their mobile aspirations and an insight into bourgeois life in the city. For with the birthday festivities over, and the children sent to another room to play, Dr Das appeared with a box containing a variety of home care products. Produced by a Swiss company and introduced as of 'international quality' these polishes, sprays, detergents and cleaners formed the basis of a home-selling pyramid.

Dr Das was not attempting to sell the products themselves, but rather the concept of home-selling, to his friends' wives. He suggested that they might phone up some friends, prepare snacks and tea, demonstrate the efficacy of the products and make some sales. Underwritten by a similar philosophy to that of the Tupperware party, these cleaning products would provide an avenue for increased sociability and allow women to contribute financially to the household purse. Dr Das demonstrated the glass cleaner on the vitrine and the washing-up liquid on a dish, but the guests were still unclear who would buy such expensive cleaning products, for Rs. 80 was a lot to spend on something which was to replace coconut husk or ash for cleaning the dishes. Expensive they may be, he agreed, but those willing to spend such an

¹ Most people I spoke to on the subject considered that birthday parties were a relatively new phenomenon, that had emerged with force as gift shoppes [sic] selling Hallmark cards arrived in the city. 'Traditionally' birthdays are not celebrated, for while astrology relies on exact knowledge of birth date and time, it does not enjoin people to celebrate this annually. Valentines Day is also observed as a new 'festival' and one, in a city with so many students, which is exceedingly popular.

amount were those who able to throw off the Indian mentality of buying the cheapest thing available. The social group who would buy such items were the 'gentry' he argued (using the English word), and the assembled guests seemed to agree.

Who then are the gentry and did those present belong to this group? I for one was momentarily confused having heard the term applied to the amorphous mass of men on the street, crowds, good-for-nothings chewing *pan* and harassing women. The word gentry was usually applied with negative connotations, "the gentry in Varanasi is no good". Less commonly, in more genteel circles, gentry referred to people of high social standing, usually a position accorded in economic terms. It became clear which of these disparate categories was being invoked, for since the imagined purchasers among the gentry would have to be approached through social networks, this gathering was including itself within this more hallowed meaning of the term.

The word gentry, like 'drawing room', always stuck out in conversations more than other English words. 'Drawing room' was more frequently used than 'gentry' and had a more agreed upon meaning. On the whole it signified a room whose sole purpose was the reception of guests, but often was applied, as in the Das' home, to what others might have called a sitting room. Therefore, in some homes it marked out a space without a television, whilst in others it implied a 'reception room', even if the room's actual use was not solely for receiving guests.

'Drawing room', whatever the certain incongruity of the term and whatever the social milieu in which it was employed, clung tenaciously to the meaning it emerged with in English in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: that room in the house which serves society not the family, the public face of a private sphere (cf. Habermas 1989: 45). Whatever the social differences, of which there were many, between those using the term drawing room, all had in common a household space that could be used for the entertainment of others, not just themselves. Many of those who had a 'drawing room' kept their television out of this room and placed it in a dedicated room or a common household space. Underlying the existence of a 'television free' space are certain ideas about television as cultural form and object, and about hospitality and sociability.

Given that the space labelled 'drawing room' was one frequently devoid of television, where there was a set present a clash of ideas arose. The complaints about declining sociability referred to above found expression in the comment that visits to peoples' houses now required forethought. What would they be watching and more importantly would this be so important to them that they would make their guests wait. "Why should we compete with their favourite serial?", people asked. The normative position of a guest as God became agonisingly confused when, making a house call, a guest's presence was overwhelmed by that of the television, that other unruly 'guest'.

My visits to houses usually involved water, tea, snacks, more snacks and sometime *pan* called for from outside. I sometimes (unreasonably) resented this overbearing 'indigestible hospitality', but quickly discovered that my early impression of families were themselves flavoured by the speed with which refreshments arrived and the quantity. Given my research interests, I hoped that the television would remain switched on, and often it did, but I realised that this resulted in less conversation. Consequently, I came to understand what people might be getting at when they complained about television competing against their conversation. There was a friction between the television, the room, and the form of behaviour expected. Two evaluations about the use of television and the importance of guests came into uneasy contact.

It can be argued that the presence of the television produces a misfit between ideas about household space and sociability. In a room like that of the Das', in which the action on Zee TV was a constant background to their socialising, a similar difficulty arises. Guests do not know where to focus their attention, eyes drift between the television and the people in the room, and the channels are changed mid-conversation.

In respect of television this problem is not confined to those that keep a 'reception room' and choose to put a television set in it. However, it is in a space such as this where a friction is most detectable and where understood conventions become misunderstood. Complaints about the interference of television in previously

understood social contexts might be understood in terms of nostalgia, but they might also be seen as mismatches between ideas about the value of television and when, or when not, the television should be watched. It is the 'drawing rooms' of families such as the Das' where the place given to television most obviously conflicts with ideas of sociality and creates social confusion.

Television in its place

In light of this discussion it might be useful to adopt the position of Leal (1990) that the place of television in people's homes, and in their lives, are intimately connected. Keshav wanted a set to put in his bedroom, Mangal had little choice as to where his set was placed and his set was put where it could be connected to the electricity outside. His parents would often move their set so that the maximum number of people could watch it, especially for the Sunday morning mythological. At other times it was moved to the interior so that viewing became more of a family affair. Others have their set in the bedroom, which becomes the locus for their viewing, many families have more than one set and much of the house represents a televisual space in some form. In all these houses televisions have their place. The relationship between the house, its members and their television, illustrates the complexity of the television, as a medium and household object

Leal's argument is important because it explores what people think about television and how they think others may view their evaluation of the set. There are Brazilian working class families who position their set so that it can be seen from outside the house, there are middle-class households who put their set in a back room, away from their reception room. However, the question is more complex than her account suggests. She argues that these working class families, because they display their sets and surround them with a medley of decorative items are 'enchanted' by the modernity that the set represents. Conversely, the middle class, with a dedicated (but hidden) television room are shown to be disenchanted by their set, concerned to relegate it to an unseen quarter of their home. For the middle-class, she argues, it is just another household item, albeit one that should be marginalised. There is much

to commend this argument, but to my mind there is considerably more to the problem than this.

Little attention is given to the question of actually available space, to the social organisation of the household and television viewing within it. Moreover, evaluations of television as household object and medium are, in the context of Varanasi, considerably more complex than is apparently the case in Brazil. In other words, cultural evaluations of television are crucial, and the significant differences and similarity between different social classes on this issue suggest that an 'enchanted' or 'disenchanted' opposition makes less sense in this particular setting. In a sense, I sometime felt, to use her vocabulary, that the middle class were much more enchanted by the television than the so-called 'lower orders'.

There were other rooms in Dr Das' home where the television could have been placed, but none would have allowed the television to have been mounted in the vitrine. It might have been put in a bedroom or, for television dinners, in their dining room. Significantly, these other rooms would have allowed for the television to be a more private medium and less visible to house guests. Indeed, *contra* Leal, it could be argued that where there are alternative spaces in which to put the set its placement becomes all the more open to interpretation because there is scope for choice. Mangal may, or may not, evaluate his set in a similar way to Dr Das, but he has little choice about where to put it. Given his extra rooms, Dr Das' decision to mount the set, on display, in the most public room of the house seems more significant than Mangal's requirement to put it where it can be attached to the passing electricity cable.

In some houses, especially in and around BHU, there was no television in the reception room but a music system, tapes, books. Therefore the task of entertaining guests was never inhibited by the television and the other more 'cultural' objects might be evaluated in terms of a refinement that would not adhere to a television set. An exiled set, by its absence, could suggest a relegation of television watching to low priority in the house. Those like the Das' were employing different understandings of the importance of the television that drew on different social and cultural

distinctions of taste (Bourdieu 1984). In a city in which people are keen to stress the importance of education over entertainment, and where the word culture usually refers to 'high' as opposed to 'pop' culture, the absence or presence of a television could strengthen or weaken their claims on these issues.

Of course, the repertoires on which people draw to make such distinctions, and to evaluate the decision of others in these matters, are themselves dependent on educational and class factors. The 'middling sort', to which the Das' so resolutely belong, refer to their social universe as a '*social circle*' or just '*circle*', in which others' distinctions clearly flow into one's own. The discussion that the assembled guests had about the cleaning products was of this nature: "*what sort of people* will use these?", they asked. Discussion about cushion covers, drapes for the sofa and other items for the home all seek to establish what sort of shop, what sort of price and, most importantly, what sort of people might have them. The term *circle* reflects what might be quite a restricted social group whose repertoires of taste are a shared but limited resource. The importance of television, especially satellite, is that it opens up the home to a wider range of ideas about the home and domesticity. The advertisements and the domestic settings of tele-dramas, as Mrs Das' comment suggested, provide a means for the evaluation of what one has ("cushion covers"), and what might also be desirable. The point, *pace* Greenough (1996), is that such a televisual repertoire contains non-local designs and objects, it is of trans-national not always 'national' or 'folk' origin.

The positioning of a television can also reflect what people watch, when and with whom, i.e., the social organisation of viewing. Very often television sets were located in bedrooms, and this was not just the case with dowry sets, but also in smaller flats where a sitting room was available. It was often the case that where a family had two sets, the cable-connected set was in the bedroom, and the other 'terrestrial only' television was in the sitting room. The former television was watched by children supervised by adults, the latter afforded more generalised access. A television set placed in what appears to be a shared family space might not necessarily precipitate a homologous equality in viewing access, in fact it may restrict access quite completely for certain junior members of the household, such as daughters-in-law.

Thus a further refinement to Leal's position, which will be explored in more depth over the course of the following two chapters, is that regard should be given to the position of the television in relation to the social organisation of the household. Class, as Leal's account suggests, is important (although more complex than her analysis submits) in considering where people put their televisions. But to focus on this, to the exclusion of other factors, creates a rather one dimensional perspective. The following chapter argues that the social context of the household, in particular the relative social identities of its members, is crucial in decisions about where the television is placed and who watches it with whom.

By looking at some advertisements for television from a thirteen year period (1984-97) it will be suggested that televisions may still represent status symbols that people want to display, but that they might also be seen in terms of their place in relations between people. Therefore, although the aesthetics and placement of television sets remains an indication of their evaluation and use, televisions might usefully be considered as markers of relationships not just status.

Televisions: from status to relations

A newspaper advertisement in the period of television's arrival (1984) in Varanasi featured a farmer, surveying the sitting room of another. He says to his friend: "Wah! How stunning! That's an amazing colour television in your house", to which the reply comes, "I have no interest in second rate or flimsy (*halka*) things, therefore in my fields too I spread the best, Nirmada Urea". A television set, as this advertisement for an agricultural product attests, was a staple image of the ideal home long before most could even afford one. This farmer must surely have been a beneficiary of the Green revolution because, as Rajagopal notes, at the time of the Asian games (1982) even a black and white television cost two or three times a middle class salary (1993: 96).

To continue with an agricultural comparison, television sets are relatively cheap nowadays, and when their prices are compared to staple foodstuffs such as wheat and *dal* (lentils) between 1984 and 1997, they are 10% cheaper and the foodstuffs 240% and 300% more expensive². Clearly there are technological and political changes in this period which have allowed televisions to become cheaper in comparative terms; what is more pertinent is that television is not a reserve of the wealthy. Higher levels of purchasing have allowed a second hand market in monochrome sets to develop (no such market yet exists for colour sets), so that those who are unable to purchase new can still afford a television. Shopkeepers in the city report that the market in the city is almost saturated and that the majority of their customers are villagers from the hinterlands of Varanasi. For the city dwellers, they say, upgrades to a colour set or dowry televisions are more common than first-time purchases.

A woman, recounting the scenes in her house on the day of Indira Gandhi's funeral, noted the enthusiasm, and envy, with which people greeted her colour set because they were both expensive and uncommon at this time. Colour televisions are still considerably more expensive than monochrome models and much more likely to be valued as status-bearing objects. Televisions are a common sight and invariably draw little comment, although those who had recently purchased their first set, or replaced an ailing one with a colour model, drew attention to this. Almost by way of complaint, since increased ownership devalued their possession, many householders suggested that everyone has a television nowadays: "*even rickshaw wallahs own them*" [i.e., the likes of Mangal] or "*even the milkman [a Yadav] has one*". In this environment, to deny the existence or importance of a household set seemed to be one powerful way in which to use television as a marker of status.

Even if, in the early days, television sets were status symbols they were also unknown technologies. The special supplement on the day of the inauguration was full of

² Prices were taken from advertisements in *Aaj* in 1984 and from the daily market prices published in the paper.

शुरू होते ही विपक्षके अनेक व उठकर इस मामलेपर बोलने किसीकी बात नहीं सुनायी। षड् घने कई बार कुछ कहना चाह पक्षने उन्हें भी नहीं कहने दिया।

प्रकट किया कि विपक्ष सदनमें इस व्यवस्थासे किसीको लाभ न और अव्यवस्था फैलानेवाले आनी चाहिये। इसपर भी सदस्य १० अध्यक्षने बैठक आधे घंटेके र दी तथा विपक्षी सदस्योंको सी बातको कारवाइमि दर्ज न दी।

कहा कि मुझे पता है कि प्रधान र गांधीने आंध्र प्रदेश विधान बुलानेके संबंधमें सदनमें क्या के लगातार हंगामेसे तंग, आकर श कि अगर आपको यह सब नके नियम और अध्यक्ष बनाये नि आश्वासन दिया कि विपक्षी

बेचनेके तार

द उक्त व्यक्ति बछड़ेकी तलाश िते-बुढ़ते वह कसाईके मकानपर उसने बछड़ेका सिर देखा। उसने सूचना बरदह थानेको दी। न्साईके घरसे बछड़ेका सिर गिरफ्तारकर लिया।

पैकी टक्करमें १७

रे

मोडिफो (कैलिफोर्निया), २५ पी.)। लास एंजेलस और सान रीच कल दो विमानोंके आपसमें ३ हो जानेसे १७ व्यक्तियोंको मृत्यु

सेनानीका निधन

२५ अगस्त (प्रे.)। वरिष्ठ और भूतपूर्व सांसद श्री रामकृष्ण ी बीमारीके बाद कल यहां सिविल धन हो गया। उनकी अवस्था ५७



इस्तीफेके बाद भास्कर राव सरकारके बने रहनेका कोई औचित्य नहीं है। उन्होंने भास्कर राव सरकारको बरखास्त करने तथा विधानसभाकी बैठक तुरंत बुलानेकी मांग की। विपक्षके कुछ अन्य सदस्योंने भी उनका समर्थन किया।

अरुण अग्रवाल एवं सन्तोष रन्देव

Canon

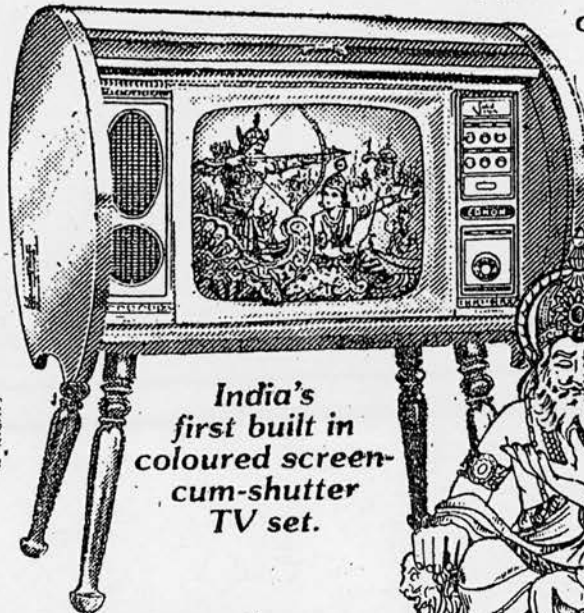
Welcomes Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi on her arrival at Varanasi on the Occasion of Inauguration of T. V. Centre.

a
tale of
two
epics

Sanjay was no doubt the oldest war correspondent in history. Was he a T.V. Commentator too? We do not know. Sitting in Indraprastha, Dhritrashtra asked, "Tell me, O Sanjay! Desirous of battle, assembled in Kurukshetra. What my own children and the Pandavas are doing?" And Sanjay described the epic battle of Mahabharata in Kurukshetra, blow by blow, sitting in what is now Nagpur. So they say, But we know for certain, you can count on the epic performance of "CANON". It gives clear blow by blow presentation of T.V. programmes you prefer.

IT'S THE TV FOR YOU AND ME
Why? see what it gives. For the first time in India, India's first built in coloured screen-cum-shutter T.V. set. Equipped with stereo-phonetic sound system. Latest Multichannel Tuner. Cute curvacious design and an after sales service to your satisfaction.

TRADE MARK
PATENT DESIGN
No. 142799-142800



India's
first built in
coloured screen-
cum-shutter
TV set.

Canon

Super Star

CANON ELECTRONICS PVT. LTD.
OSIDC Complex No. 1 Wazirpur, Industrial Area
New Delhi-110052. Gram: CLARIONS.
Phones: 216681, 716283, 742420.



Plate 6: 5. India's first built in coloured screen-cum-shuttered TV set.

advice about how to watch (not in the dark and not too close) and ways to care for and protect the set. The illustration (overleaf) shows an early set, which, with its “cute and curvacious [sic] design” negates the technological conditions of its production. The emphasis on shape over technology renders an unfamiliar object one that can be an attractive feature of the living room. With its glamorous cabinet and turned wooden legs, it can be a television *or* an attractive addition to the sitting room; either way it is a becoming piece of furniture. When a television was a relatively unknown item, its design had to render it capable of sitting easily within the ‘drawing rooms’ of its owners. The attraction of the ‘cute and curvacious’ set was that an unfamiliar technology was domesticated by being placed in a glamorous shuttered cabinet.

Shutters are rarely seen on sets nowadays, except on one model produced by an Indian company, which to my mind seemed consciously ‘retro’ in its styling. These early shuttered sets, now replaced by more contemporary designs, have a range of uses in the household.

In Kailashnath Pandey’s house an old television has been transformed into the locus of household worship. The images of *Ganesh*, *Lakshmi* and other deities, and assorted miscellanea for worship have been placed within the cabinet and the shutters removed to ensure constant *darshan*.

In the Mishra household, a large television cabinet, now devoid of the set, has been transformed into the focus for a different sort of devotion. The photo of a recently deceased son has been placed in the cabinet. Appreciating the way in which this glass fronted object draws all eyes towards it, this family have employed the visual magnetism of the object to ensure the continued presence of their loved-one in the life of the household.

The shift, from television sets styled as furniture and regarded as attractive for this reason, to more ‘modern’ looking objects is a shift that reflects changes in the media institutions in which sets are implicated, and their place within the household. Wood

is out, matt black plastic in; feminine curvaceous form no longer cute, straight lines more manly. Television remains hotly debated, but the nature of its actual technological construction no longer needs be concealed in a wooden cabinet. The emphasis now is on an array of features and bewildering accounts of technological specification.

The institutions in which technologies exist are continuously open to change and technologies can reveal these shifts. A television must now be 'cable ready' to perform in a multi-channel environment, and a set that receives cable television might also need the 'child lock' which is a common feature and a strong selling point on contemporary sets. The control of viewing which could be achieved by closing the shutters is now achieved through other means. Since the introduction of what are often regarded as inappropriate channels 'invaded' the set, child locks have become an important marketing tool for companies unwilling to allow parental concern over content to dent their sales figures. The need for child-locks also suggests that children are now technologically literate and that it is only through such devices that parents can control their television viewing.

Televisions that are no longer in use as communication technologies are likely to be the first sets that a household possessed. Mechanical failure, or the resources enabling the purchase of an additional, or colour set, may have led to this original set becoming freed for use by a small unit within the household, or turned into an entirely different household object. The marriage of a son might have precipitated the arrival of an additional set, or the dowry of a daughter the departure of one. Over time, and as the number of sets increases, the household becomes a more complex media space. The biography of a set can be related to the developmental cycle of the domestic group (cf. Fortes 1958). The phases of "expansion, dispersion and replacement" in which television sets break down, are given or received in dowry or a simply added to, suggests one strict parallel that can be drawn.

We might more fruitfully consider the movements, and uses of sets, in terms of these phases within the household and by so doing relate household structure, size (and spaces) to the place of television in the house and the practices of viewing within it.

Televisions may represent important markers of socio-economic status, but as they have become more familiar objects within the household they have also begun to mark out relations between people. This argument will be developed over the following chapters but, for now, we should consider some advertisements which cast more light on the idea that televisions, as markers of relationships between people, can support the transformation or substantiation of status relations.

Three newspaper advertisements, for the Onida brand of televisions, suggests some of the ways in which televisions are implicated in relationships between members of the family. They also pinpoint some of crucial televisual relationships which later chapters explore in more detail.

In a picture of a husband and wife sitting at home, the mother is knitting and their daughter, sporting a smart *salweer kamiz* 'suit' and wearing high heels is heading out of the house. The caption reads:

Do you need to be rescued from the view of those at home? Do you need to get out? Turn on the Onida B&W and what is difficult becomes easy.

"Do you need to shut up your garrulous *sas* (HM)?", asks an exasperated daughter-in-law (*bahu*). Turn on the Onida B&W. Chatter stops.

A young boy stands by his father, clutching a report card and looking concerned.

Do you need to get your daddy (*dadi*) to sign your report card?

Don't worry. Just make sure you turn the Onida B&W on first.

(*Aaj* x. 1993)³.

However, a vestige of the status implications has returned to some Onida advertisements of the following year (*Aaj* 7. xi. 94) which begins: "A question of honour...there is no other TV like it, take away a magnificent Onida set at this price. There'll be celebration in your home and gossip from the neighbours". The advertisement ends by equating the best picture and clear sound with the "pride of the family" (*khandani shaan ki*).

³ I conducted a thirteen year survey of the local paper *Aaj* for the month of October. It was necessary to chose a single month due to constraints of time and October, because it is a time of several festivals and related marketing activity, seemed a suitable month for my purposes.

This evokes a “keeping up with the Pandeys” appeal to consumption and we have seen that for Keshav a sense of deprivation, of not having what others around him have, was one reason behind his desire to own a set. But the tendency seems to be, as the earlier range of adverts showed, to highlight the place of television within intra-familial relations. For Keshav, who wanted a set to enhance a conjugal space in opposition to household space, the television would be an element in a decorative repertoire but also reflected household relations.

These Onida examples seem to stress distraction and the transformation of relationships through television: turn on the television and your father no longer retains the role of father whose critical eye on the report card is to be feared; shut up your mother-in-law by switching on the television. In this sense they mark a change from earlier newspaper commentary and advertisements, which stressed family unity in front of the set and therefore the entrenchment of family relations through shared viewing. However, they can also be read as expressive of rather more expected roles in the household. The image of a daughter-in-law turning on the television, or performing any other task, at her mother-in-law’s request is quite familiar. Similarly, the son with the report card might expect to hear his father say “turn on the television”. As we will see over the course of the following two chapters, television viewing, as the mixed evidence of these advertisements suggests, allows for both the reiteration and partial transformation of household relationships.

The woman who told me that television had become “another member” of her family was making a similar point. This reflection on the television’s position within the domestic sphere precipitated an anthropomorphism because, as she saw it, like any other member of her family the television was part of a web of sociality and was as implicated in this as any other household member. Televisions are not watched in a social vacuum and they do not sit in household spaces which are devoid of people and their attempts to mould their living spaces. They are placed quite intentionally in some rooms rather than others (if there are rooms to choose from) and their positioning reflects and informs the ways in which it is watched. The location of a television in the house certainly speaks of its importance in its owners’ lives, but it also impacts on its potential to inform the relationships of those that view (or do not

view) it. Keshav's desire for a 'conjugal set' in his bedroom, that would exclude his elder brother (his wife's *jeth*, HeB, a relation of avoidance), was an acknowledgement of the ways in which television, as aesthetic object and household medium, is highly implicated in relations between people. Clearly, advertisements do not tell us all the story but they do sometimes capture something pertinent about a object or product. These Onida advertisements, by grasping the sociality of viewing, provide a good starting point for the following chapters.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Television and the family: content in context

Introduction

This chapter focuses on television viewing within the domestic sphere but begins in the public sphere. A protest organised by the 'Varanasi (South) Progress Struggle Committee' provides a suitable point of departure for a discussion of contemporary television programmes and their often uneasy place in the life of a joint family. During fieldwork there were, to my knowledge, few public meetings which discussed the issue of television in such a direct manner. Most of the conversations I had, and on which this section is based, were held with individuals in household or family settings. Yet this public event touched on aspects of televisual culture that trouble many families, and illustrates that whilst there is concern about contemporary television, this group considered it necessary to arrange a formal protest.

The members of this committee were young students seeking to nurture a social and political standing in the southern section of the city. All were, or had been, members of BHU (Banaras Hindu University). They considered their organisation to be apolitical although their ultimate objective was to construct a platform from which to launch political careers. Their protest, which took the form of a four hour hunger strike and included a press briefing, was held outside the gates of the university. The following day a report in *Dainik Jagran* read "A hunger strike in opposition to the broadcast of obscenity on television" (8. iv. 97). The report outlined, in parts verbatim, the views expressed by those present. Foreign satellite channels and Doordarshan were criticised, in uncompromising language which drew on mythological imagery:

In Indian culture shame (*lajja*) has a special place but foreign channels are adamant in openly undressing it (*cheer haran karna*). If time passes and people do not become conscious and do not criticise the broadcasting of obscenity then it is certain that the civilisational integrity of this country will become endangered.

Many newspaper readers of the sort with whom I interacted would have agreed with the sentiments expressed in the article. Others might have seen, as one member himself confided later, that much expressed was more political posturing than a critique of broadcast media and a manifesto for change; a four-hour hunger strike hardly befits the urgency of the battle for which the members were stressing the need.

Be this as it may, the committee members had chosen an issue on which there was no shortage of opinions and expressed them in a way which strongly resonated with my observations and interviews on household television viewing. In this respect the comments cited above provide a good starting point for this chapter.

Television programmes have changed, all agree on that, but many would argue that they have changed for the worse. Yet time and again I was confronted by the sense that it was the relations between people seated in front of the television that actually provoked concern over the programming. In this way the choice of, or reaction to, a programme (or genre) seemed highly contingent on who was present in front of the set. The remainder of this chapter will explore how relations between members of the joint family pattern the practice of viewing.

As an earlier chapter argued, an anthropological approach to television viewing might most profitably consider the contexts in which viewing occurs. Programmes are clearly important, as will be shown, but television viewing first needs to be located within the warp and woof of household life and activities. In this chapter, one household will be the primary focus of an analysis which examines the play of their relationships in front of the television set. Attention is focused on how gender and kinship pattern the viewing of a joint family and these are set within an account which stresses the temporality of daily life. In particular the idiom of shame (*lajja* or *sharm*) will be investigated as one that guides much household and televisual activity.

As the words and deeds of the committee suggest, the idea of *sharm* has a much wider frame of reference and applies to a much larger collectivity. As a means with which to describe family interaction and Indian reactions to the contemporary television environment *sharm* is a particularly versatile idiom. *Sharm* simultaneously links the

larger question of Indian 'culture' in the face of foreign television to the relations of household members.

Beauty shows: Family television?

When, in late November 1996, feminists and political activists raided showrooms in Bangalore, daubing paint over consumer goods made by the sponsors of the Miss World competition, they were acting on a widespread anger about the forthcoming pageant. The imminent arrival of women in evening wear and swimsuits in the city, and subsequently in living rooms across India, unleashed a torrent of critical reaction. The involvement of consumer goods enhanced the symbolic appeal of their protest, for the connection between BPL (makers of televisions, fridges and other electrical goods) and the pageant was, for them, a further sign of the commodification of the (Indian) female body¹.

I was never involved in any discussions on this pageant, but it represents a highly public example of the widespread perception that much shown on television was at odds with "Indian culture" and was certainly not family viewing. "Sexy, sexy" are the words that sum up the perceived orientation, and dominant images, of modern media, be it film or television, Western or Indian, and have replaced those of an earlier period: "disco, disco". These are the words suggested by countless film songs which gain currency by endless transmission on television, and by repetition wherever youths gather. They evoke women in miniskirts dancing provocatively with groups of men, hint at the era-defining song "*Choli ke peeche kya hai?*" (What's under your blouse?), adulterous relationships, flirting and a general lack of emotional restraint. These images harness what is seen as specifically un-Indian licentiousness, immodesty, and scantily clad bodies. These are images and values that guide most public and domestic criticism of contemporary television.

¹ A member of the *Mahila Jagran* (Women's Awakening) group called the pageant a "dirty brazen-faced show" (cited by Russell 1997: 12). This comment was reported in *The Asian Age* newspaper, a paper I was unable to receive in Varanasi because shopkeepers had withdrawn it from their stalls after a picture of exposed breasts was published.

Characteristically three channels are singled out in this context: MTV, V TV and Star Plus. However, many argue that foreign films and channels are not the sole violators of the modesty of the nation and its families. It was DD1, the national channel that broadcast Miss World. Both DD and indigenous Hindi films are at least as culpable in depicting ill-clad women as objects of desire and complicit in this debasement of Indian values. It has been noted that Hindi films show nothing more explicit than 'wet sari' scenes or metaphorical representations of kissing (e.g., Kishen 1981). However, the small number of films that are accorded the status of 'family films', and the likelihood in recent films of scenes depicting rape, kissing or scantily clad women suggests that Hindi films too can easily transgress the boundaries of decency as seen through local eyes

Television is often criticised in a direct way, either as a harmful medium *per se* or as a purveyor of harmful programmes. However, it is also criticised in a fashion which bears less on programmes but more on the web of social relationships in which television watching is implicated. People ask, rhetorically, how it is possible for them to watch television as a family, when they know that those present will become steeped in embarrassment. Such searching questions are commonplace and this suggests that it is the relations between viewers which are central in guiding access, choice and reaction to programmes. The quest for a film that can be categorised as a 'family film', or a programme that can be watched by *all*, suggests the value of an analytical approach that highlights the social relations in which viewing practice is embedded and which guides programme evaluation.

Before describing the practicalities of this for one joint family it is first necessary to consider the implications of *sharm* at the personal and national level. With a better understanding of these ideas their importance in organising family viewing can be illustrated.

Undressing the concept of shame

The committee members claimed that shame has a 'special place' in Indian culture, though writers on other regions make similar claims (e.g., Gilmore 1987; Herzfeld 1980). Peristiany, for example, sees shame and honour as a "morally supreme" set of values in the circum-Mediterranean, pervasive in modes of consciousness and social organisation (cited in Gilmore 1987: 2). What is clear in this European context is that shame and honour are a reciprocal set where the honour of men (or the family and lineage) depends on the shame of their women.

In the Indian context shame, *sharm* or *lajja*, need not be viewed as so concretely tied to honour, although a shameless person may indeed threaten the honour of a larger social body. Shame is linked to social structure, particularly patrilineality, and in this sense is a demand made of women by men. However, by linking shame to honour these writers do not allow emotion and practical aspects of shame to emerge.

A short word, but one containing encyclopaedias of nuance. It was not only shame that his mothers forbade Omar Khayyam to feel, but also embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts (Rushdie 1983: 39).

This is how Salman Rushdie, in his eponymous novel, defines the Urdu *sharm*, a synonym of *lajja*. *Sharm* is all of the things that Rushdie mentions; It is a quality that people (especially women) should have or show, and something they should avoid. A suitably modest woman is one who has a sense of her place in the world. A *besharm* woman (without shame) acts in ways ill-befitting to her status and/or context. Those who are *sharm* (modest) feel *sharm* (embarrassment) easily, and that they do so indexes their sense of decency. *Sharm* is a relational idiom: it hinges on perceptions of the social order and one's place within it (Abu-Lughod 1986: 105-8), and is therefore resolutely implicated in social structure. The Mediterranean literature tends to stress the implication of shame and wider social relations, e.g., of a woman to her lineage, though it is important to restore domestic meanings to it in the South Asian setting.

It is a central idiom in the organisation of joint family life guiding relations between men and women, and across generations.

Sharm, in the sense of modesty, or acknowledging one's place in the world, is communicated through the body. Appropriate bodily deportment and the control of eyes signal the deference and modesty of one who is *sharm*. The body is central in communicating *sharm* and the body of a well-socialised woman signals the deference and demureness required of her in a particular social or spatial context. *Sharm* can be viewed, following Bourdieu as:

a disposition inculcated from the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from within the group - that is to say from the aggregate of individuals endowed with the same dispositions and interests...a permanent disposition embedded in the agents' very bodies, in the form of mental dispositions and schemes of perception...and also at a deeper level in the form of bodily positions and stances and ways of sitting and standing, looking, speaking and walking (1977: 15).

Although the posture of the body, or its actual absence from a social context, may signal modesty, extra-bodily techniques are important. Veiling is perhaps the most tangible means through which *sharm* is communicated. In Varanasi, and elsewhere in north India, the specific idiom employed is that of *gunghat nikalna*, (*gunghat* is the loose end of the sari). The action involves using this end to cover the top of the head and the face and emphasis is placed on avoiding the meeting of eyes. The practice of *gunghat nikalna* can be infinitely subtle: a highly flexible means depending on social context (cf. Sharma 1978). Unmarried women, who very rarely wear sarees, use their scarf (*dupatta*) to effect a more partial seclusion and communication of modesty. A girl who failed to cover her breasts adequately with her *dupatta* would face, in my experience, the ascription of shamelessness, by both men and women.

The ways in which clothing, as an adjunct to bodily disposition, provides a very versatile resource for indicating shame, is one point at which contemporary television conflicts with the cultural reasoning of *sharm*. The English word 'dress' was endlessly employed in discussions about television programmes. This simple word, not requiring any elaboration by those who used it in this context, highlights the stark disjunction between ideas about the body, and modesty on and around the television

set. MTV was not watched, or some films disallowed by parents for one overarching reason - 'dress'. Veiling communicates deference, though its vocabulary is that of sexuality and chastity (Abu-Lughod 1986: 161). Dress marks the subtle differences between modesty and sexuality and therefore "clothing matters" (Tarlo 1996) both on and off the television screen.

Sharm, or its negative *besharm* have ascriptive properties: they are used to make judgements about the nature of persons. Indeed it is a sense of *sharm* that separates humans from animals². Dogs fornicate in the street because they have no sense of *sharm*, and westerners are deemed as *besharm* because of their purported proclivity to be similarly less discreet in matters sexual. Muslim and Hindu patrons of Kali's tea shop suggested that the way Western women swanned around the city in state of virtual 'nudity' was *besharm* since it showed disrespect for the social context. A friend who came house-visiting with me and quickly sought to discern how she should address family members was eulogised ever after. By seeking to determine *who* she was in relation to others, and therefore *how* she should act with each household member, she had demonstrated that she was *sharm*. (It was suggested that she would therefore make a good wife.) In this ascriptive sense *sharm* has both positive and negative evaluations.

Sharm also has, as Friedrich speaking of honour points out, cognitive and pragmatic qualities (cited in Abu-Lughod 1986: 86). It is a code for interpretation and action, an idiom through which judgements are made and actions guided. The decision of a daughter-in-law to leave the room when embarrassing scenes invade the television screen, or when senior kin of her *sas* (HF) enter the room, is guided by a sense of *sharm*. The decision of a mother to disallow her daughter to visit the cinema with a boy, made on the basis of what others will say, is similarly based on notions of *sharm*. *Sharm* guides the behaviour of individuals and provides an idiom through which one's

² Buder Mukhopadhyay's "*Lajjasilata*", a treatise written in nineteenth century Bengal and discussed by Chatterjee (1989), likewise treats *sharm* as a human as opposed to animal emotion and one that women, more than men must "cultivate and cherish" (242) within the domestic sphere.

own and others' actions can be judged. The understanding that it is shared - 'others will think it shameless' - guides those that play under these 'rules'.

The mother who disallows the cinema trip which is, in her view, utterly harmless, is compelled to have regard for other possible interpretations of her decision. It should be stressed, therefore, that apparent obedience by women should not be read as uncritical subservience. Women are often unwilling players in a game whose rules are patriarchal. The work of Raheja and Gold (1994) is particularly valuable in drawing out the parody and sarcasm that can often be present in apparent submission to the dictates of (male) tradition. However, the extent to which it can be resisted by women should not be overplayed.

That said, men admitted to feeling shame too, and perhaps because they wanted to unhook this shame from the perceived femininity of *sharm* they called it *sankoch* (embarrassment or diffidence). Young men at Kali's tea shop were prone to feel embarrassment if their father entered, their conversation would quickly dry up. They often left as quickly as possible, subtly stubbing out their cigarette as they did so. Abu-Lughod, by claiming that shame is an avenue to honour for both men and women is perhaps closest to revealing the importance of it for both (1986: 155).

***Sharm* and the wider community**

Sharm is therefore both a pragmatic and cognitive code which guides interpretations of situations and behaviours (of self and other) and patterns responses in variable contexts. These contexts may be domestic or involve the wider community. In the sense in which *sharm* was employed by the politicians of southern Varanasi it emerges as an idiom that is intimately linked to women and the female body and over which, therefore, men often have a discursive prerogative.

By referring to the undressing (*cheer haran*)³ of uniquely Indian values the committee members invoked an image of a familiar scene in the *Mahabharata*. Yudhishtira gambles (and loses) his kingdom, wealth and four brothers and is coaxed into staking Draupadi, a wife shared by the brothers in a polyandrous marriage. The winner of the bet, Duryodhana, has Draupadi brought to him and then seeks to undress her (*cheer haran karna*) and see what sort of woman she is. Draupadi appeals to the God Krishna who intervenes, providing a fresh sari from the palm of his hand for each one that is removed from her body. This episode leads to the battle of Kurukshetra in which her menfolk fight to avenge this assault on *their* honour.

This allusion to a battle of the past, and its transposition to a contemporary context, can be read at several levels, for women, and especially Draupadi, have become central elements in the discourse of tradition in India. The way in which women have become “neither subject, nor object but ground” (Mani 1989: 117) of debates, whether ostensibly about them or not, is intertwined with interactions between colonialists and Indian élites. Through such (often textual) interactions, and the partial understandings on which they were premised, women came to be represented as submissive to the dictates of religion, religion viewed as the guiding source of tradition (*ibid.*). Through a complex process of discursive shifts, women came to represent the ‘traditional’ India, that part of it that had been lost or corrupted in its fall from a prior state of grace⁴. It was women, in the resolution of the contradictory claims of nationalism, that became the upholders of tradition and through whose bodies the effects of change could be measured. They became, in Mani’s phrase, “sites upon which various versions of scripture/tradition/law are elaborated and contested” (*ibid.*: 115).

³ Mankekar (1993), writing about this scene in its televised form, refers to the act as *vastraharan*. The committee, by specifically referring to *cheer haran*, direct the attention of their audience to the mythological context. This phrase is employed in two different contexts: Draupadi’s disrobing and Krishna’s hiding of the herd girls’ (*gopis*) clothes, cf. McGregor (1993: 321).

⁴ Limited space precludes a fuller discussion of the forms of interaction between different sections of the Indian élite and the British out of which women came to occupy this central position in such discussions (cf. Chatterjee 1989; Raheja and Gold 1993; Sangari and Vaid 1989).

Nationalists, be they reformist or conservative in inclination, played on this symbolic role given to women. Nationalists resolved that however much men changed, women must retain for the good of society the core Indian values. As Chatterjee notes (1989: 238-9) “spiritual as India and female” was opposed to “material as west and men”. Indian women represented something important in the flux of the period, but the representing was done by men and women like Draupadi could symbolise different things to different people. She has been variously appropriated by nationalists as a call for men to defend the honour of a country ‘disrobed’ (insulted) by colonialists and later by Gandhi, “who focused on her agency to encourage Hindu women to participate in the freedom struggle” (Mankekar 1993b: 485, original emphasis).

The committee members were in suitably nationalist company when they appropriated Draupadi to represent a country whose modesty was being insulted by foreign television. In a fresh historical context, the body of Draupadi (and women in general) was the site of their polemic. The story of Draupadi’s disrobing not only evokes the violent insulting of a woman but also contains a call for men to avenge this slight to their honour. A battle of the magnitude of Kuruskhetra is a worthy parallel to that which, they argued, must be fought to reestablish an Indian sense of propriety on contemporary television. Their protest was a call to fight the contempt of those who undress a uniquely Indian sense of modesty by allowing ill-clad women into their sitting rooms.

The wider community often makes judgements (or is in a position to do so) concerning *sharm* or *besharm* individuals. By invoking the idiom of *sharm* the committee could mark contemporary television as the transgressor of the norms of the community within a well understood framework of evaluation. At the same time, because the story centres on clothes and their removal, it allows a more literal interpretation, for ideas about ‘dress’ are central in evaluations of television. The appropriately dressed woman, *dupatta* well-positioned or sari subtly deployed to affect social distance and communicate *sharm*, is contrasted to the miniskirts of the MTV generation. Controlled sexuality is opposed to licentiousness and Indian standards to those of a less cultured (because its females are *besharm*) West. It is the subtlety with

which clothing makes statements and the brashness of the women on contemporary television that allows ideas about *sharm*, which are wrapped up in clothing, to be easily undressed.

There are complex historical factors that allow figures such as Draupadi to be incorporated into such polemics, and the feminine, moral and cultural values she was employed to represent are widely recognised. We can now progress from the uses of Draupadi's disrobing in a public polemic against television to see how these understandings guide everyday and televisual practice. Reaction to representations of women on television, and the expectations of women (in their behaviour with certain male members of the household), are guided by the idea of *sharm* that has been discussed above. In front of the television, where these ideas come into conflict, family viewing is an activity which has to address the disjunctions between on-screen and off-screen life.

A family in front of their television

The Mishra household is a Brahman one of two parents, their three married sons and a total of seven children. During my fieldwork another brother, also married, suffered a heart attack and died. His wife and child remain in the household. The three remaining brothers are, in descending age Munja, Guddu and Baira. Their house is relatively large and all the conjugal units have their own rooms, though I frequently heard comments about a paucity of space as the family continued to grow. The comfortable, though far from affluent, situation of the family means that the women are not required to compromise *purdah* and their existence is, with rare exceptions, a housebound one. The men, through activities in the university and at important *chay* and *pan* shops, are well known and key players in the political and public sphere in this part of the city. Their deceased brother was a particularly well respected man and a crucial source of cultural capital for the family. The senior female, whom I called *mausiji* (MZ) is the relaxed matriarch of the family. Her husband, particularly since the death of his son, is reserved and has delegated much responsibility to his wife and sons.

The family own a single television set and an old video cassette player. In common with other families, they do not keep their television set in their drawing room but instead keep the set and its viewing confined to a more private, internal space of the house. Their television room is small and, save a sofa and a few cushions, without furniture or decoration. The size of the room plays a considerable role in determining the actual patterns of viewing and it should be borne in mind that the spatial limitations of the television room premise much that follows. However, it is in their drawing room that an old television cabinet has been employed to frame a picture of their deceased member. The drawing room is very much a public quarter of an otherwise private house. Guests are received and attended to here, whereas the family itself spend long periods at the back of the house in a large courtyard.

The pre-school schedule.

On DD1, the national hymn 'Vande Mataram' is followed by 'Thought for the day' and then Worship (*aradhana*). Following is a unit from the university teaching programmes.

On Sony, children are offered cartoons, a favourite being Dennis the Menace, although the Mishra children do not get permission to watch this.

On Zee TV, Disney hour is followed by more cartoons. Housewives up earlier may have seen the Low Cal show, health and fitness for women.

The older generation profess to enjoying religious programmes: NEPC provides *bhakti*, *katha* and *bhajan*.

On Star Plus: Good Morning India, with business news and yoga in tight fitting leotards.

The morning rush to have children off to school and their lunchboxes packed has passed. Men are making movements towards work, *chay* or *pan* shops. The house is quieter. Those remaining at home have a chance to relax and enjoy a favourite serial or two. The women leave their duties to watch *Shanti*, the first ever afternoon

soap and now the first of eight serials on DD1 between now and 3.30pm. Mausiji is happy to let her daughters-in-law watch this and other serials during the day. She herself likes many of the shows on offer and sees no reason why she should deny to others what she herself enjoys. Many married women would find such an attitude refreshingly easy-going, for mothers-in-law are apt to control quite closely how much, if not also what, is watched during the day by junior women.

Shanti, Ek Ghar ki kahani (The story of one house).

The story, as the subtitle contends, of one house, a house fraught with the pressures of a past that cannot be forgotten, because Shanti, the protagonist, will not let it be forgotten. Within the walls of the house of the rich industrialist Raj Singh, lives a family forced by Shanti to confront his past actions: the rape of a labourer (Tulsidevi) which resulted in Shanti's conception. In the narrative present, twenty five years later, Shanti begins a crusade to avenge the crime, to extract from Raj (and his friend and accomplice Kamesh Mahadevan) a recognition of their actions. The locale is never revealed, though the occupation of characters in the film industry, the lifestyles portrayed and instability of the marriages lead most to presume that it is Bombay. Shanti, now a successful journalist and owner of a newspaper, lives with her mother and is engaged to Sanjay Khanna, a film star. The main locus of attention is Shanti Mansion, the house where Tulsidevi was working when the rape occurred. Within this house is the playing out of one of the principal structural elements of myth: an extended family, in their ancestral home, attempting to hold itself together in the face of threats to unity from within and without. Raj and his wife, Indira, have five children; Somesh, a film director whose marriage has been weakened by an extramarital relationship, Niddhi, Ramesh, Rohan and Maya. The threats to the unity and survival of the family and house come from Shanti, from the personal and commercial alliances that segment the household and the split loyalties that affairs and unstable marriages have precipitated.

Daytime televisual bingeing by the women in the Mishra household is something of a practical response to the freedom the empty house provides, although Mausiji's beneficence is clearly important. Both Mausiji and her sons suggest that, ideally, viewing during the day is the preserve of women and in the evening that of men.

Such a pattern is repeated in many single set households but obviously nothing is as clear cut as this and often all watch together during the evening.

During the day there is no lack of televisual entertainment for those with a cable connection. Junnaji, the deceased member of the family, had been instrumental in the decision to get a cable connection. His primary motivation had been to watch cricket, (the rights to many test series are held by the sports channel ESPN, hence the need), though, quite predictably in his opinion, once they had cable there was no looking back. Three months after the cricket series ended, all had agreed that cable was not a bad thing if used appropriately. The remainder of this chapter considers what appropriate may mean to the Mishra family and how this guides the practice of viewing in their house.

Servant or no servant, the day involves a series of tasks around which the women's television viewing is organised. School hours are variable, changing with the seasons, and children arrive and leave home at different times. Electricity comes and goes too, and seriously disturbs all manner of activities. However, power cuts conform to some vaguely recognisable pattern and, with forethought, household tasks and television viewing can be juggled to ensure maximum efficiency and enjoyment. Expressing surprise at such 'planning' I was told that no one wanted to be "caught up in a serial" (*seriyal me fanse jana*) and then deprived of it. Sometimes whole weeks can go by when viewers are deprived of contact with on-screen friends. My attempts to record Shanti regularly gave me personal experience of this. It was not unusual to see 'electricity inverters' and batteries near the television set, to ensure that such disruption was minimised. Some were quite explicit about the symbiotic relationship between these two technologies.

"I'm a housewife and work morning till evening...I work in the kitchen and move backwards and forwards between the TV". So remarks Chandra when asked about her television habits. Access can be partial, and the television set like a radio, when work deprives people of access to the pictures. However, if the volume is turned up high enough it may be possible to follow the drama as it unfolds. In the Mishra household, the women move in and out of the television room, sharing snippets of

action between each other and joking to themselves about how much they plan their lives around that of Shanti. One shouts “come now, quick” and then takes over the task from another.

The brothers come home for lunch, play with the younger children, read some newspaper, sleep or tend to the garden. Their demands are important and they receive attention whilst at home, but their wives recognise that when they are out of the house there is televisual freedom which often surpasses that when they return. A young girl in another household put this quite succinctly: “We watch in the morning and evening, but if our father comes home in the afternoon we switch off the set immediately”.

Later in the afternoon, children are returning home from school, carried on overloaded rickshaws, or those that attend more exclusive schools by bus. Voices return to the household. Stomachs need filling and faces washing. The peace of the afternoon is shattered. Homework has to be supervised, so too the running battles between children with different ideas about which of the afternoon cartoons demand their attention. This is not a time for mothers to watch television, except perhaps in a supervisory role. For many the television day may be over until the evening food has been served and the children are fast asleep.

After school cartoons.

The Milky Bar kid, now Indian, hands out his chocolate to his marauding Indian devotees on their spacecraft. A Hindi speaking SuperTed saves the planet from unspeakable evils. Top Cat emerges from his trash can home, receives a telephone call and then proceeds to wreak havoc across the neighbourhood. Dastardly and Mutley kidnap Penelope PitStop, and she narrowly avoids being flattened by an oncoming train. Mothers tell their kids to eat up, or turn off the set and get on with their work with a veiled threat “Daddy is coming home soon”. This usually persuades children to turn off Zee TV’s *Disney Hour*.

The Mishra men come home later, typically after a good few hours immersed in political chat, *pan* consumption and general socialising. They may, or may not, want to watch television but it is at this point of the day, when adults have some spare time, that the desires of individuals to watch television must be measured against those of others present.

In some sense, daily household routines and practices are so patterned that such reconciliation is never necessary. Women watch during the day when men are out of the house, knowing that what happened last night - "the men watched the cricket so we [the women] couldn't watch anything else" - might happen again tonight. By evening time, it is the right of men to watch, and the responsibility of women to accept their televisual pre-eminence and let them have their way. However, while this may often be the case, the family does watch together.

My abiding televisual memory of the Mishra family was of all the adults, and the two oldest daughters packed in their small television room watching Keanu Reeves save the day, and most of the passengers on a booby trapped bus. *Speed* was, they exclaimed as I entered the room, an excellent film, "Have you seen it?" It was full of excitement, action, tension with none of the unsuitable scenes that led people to suggest that Star Movies was a purveyor of soft-porn. *Speed* was, by common consensus, a family film but, on the basis of other experiences, it struck me as somewhat unusual that all the adult members of a joint family, and some children too, were sitting together in a small room watching the same movie.

The respectability of this particular film notwithstanding, joint family viewing of this nature requires a certain recasting of relations between brothers and their wives⁵. Relations between women and their husbands' brothers, and between men and their brothers' wives, are patterned according to the seniority of the brothers. A man will

⁵ I have termed this as a matter of the relation between brothers and their wives but is important to note, as the following sections will clarify, that the relations must be viewed as cutting both ways. However, seniority is reckoned through age of brothers, not wives. Since, of necessity, the majority of my discussions on which this material is based were with the men of the household my description will occasionally lapse into one that describes the politics of television viewing from the point of view of men.

refer to his elder brothers' wives as *bhabhi*, in both referential and vocative contexts (cf. Vatuk 1982: 57) and their relationship will be an informal or joking one, stereotypically considered as having sexual undertones. On the other hand, a man looking down in terms of age, i.e., at his younger brothers' wives, will conduct a relationship of avoidance, varying family-to-family but usually entailing touch, speech and direct sight. In general the avoidance is spatial. All such measures, and the extent to which they are performed, vary according to spatial and social contexts (Jeffery *et al* 1989: 99). Referentially, a man will call women in this relationship *jethi* for he is her *jeth* (HeB); the vocative term may be *bahu* or simply *tum*, you.

Jeffery's point about the maintenance of 'social distance' and the spatial context is important here. In most everyday contexts social distance is secured by women remaining out of the spaces in which her *jeth*, or husband's senior kin, may be. Where this is compromised, doing *gunghat* can provide this distance, thus Sharma argues (1978: 222-3) that veiling renders women socially invisible while not necessitating total seclusion. The veil provides symbolically, another room, a portable means for keeping distance from a *jeth*, but also one's *sas* (HF) and their husband's senior male kin (*ibid.*: 222). Between a *bhabhi* and her *devar* (HyB) no such veiling is required. Some practical examples of these relationships may prove instructive.

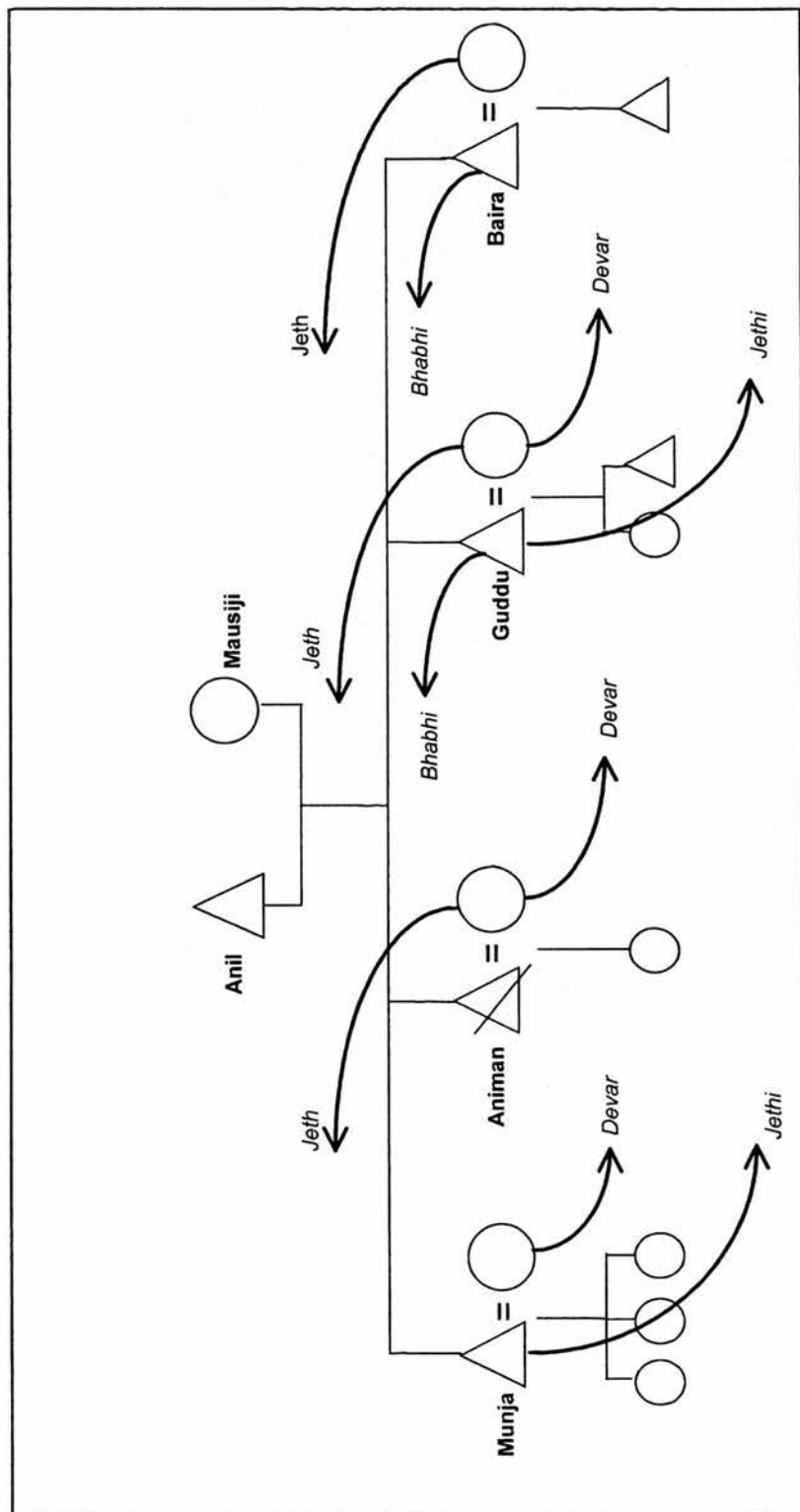
I lived next door to the Mishras, with Pramati, his wife and their young daughter. Pramati is a *bhai*⁶ of Munja, Guddu and Baira, their mother Pramati's deceased mother's sister. Soon after I moved into their house, and it became clear that I would be staying, an agreed kin relation became necessary. Had I become Pramati's younger brother, his wife Pivati, slightly younger than myself, would have become my *bhabhi* with all that entails. Necessarily I became Pivati's brother and on the occasion of *Rakhi bandhan*⁷ this relationship was formalised.

⁶ The term *bhai*, brother has a meaning that extends beyond that of brother (B). It also denotes FBS, MBS, FZS, and MZS, and thus to male relations reckoned bilaterally.

⁷ *Rakhi bandhan* is held on the full moon of *Savan* (August-September). Sisters tie a talisman on the wrist of their brothers, feed them sweets and receive a token amount of money and a vow of protection from the brothers.

Pramat is younger than all his brothers next door and all their wives are his *bhabhis*. Conversely Pivati, since her husband's brothers are older, stands in an avoidance relationship to them. When they visit the house, they would clear their throats or otherwise announce their arrival, giving Pivati time to veil and/or move into another room. Although, the extent to which such social distance is maintained varies from household to household it was, in this high-status Brahmin family, quite thoroughly upheld. When one of Pramat's *bhais* called, and they both remained in the bedroom watching television, the usually easy going position of bodies became a little more charged. Relaxed bodies started shuffling and Pivati would head towards the verandah from where, veiled, she would continue to watch.

The Mishra household



The bold lines mark the joking and avoidance relationships between members of the family.

Continuity and change in front of the single set

How do these relationships work out in front of the television in the Mishra household? Three brothers, four wives, their children, and Mausiji and her husband, have to reconcile their desire to watch television together, on a single set in a small room. Not only would they be unlikely to share a common space like that for any other purpose, but they are aware that when they are watching television many programmes are liable to cause further embarrassment between them.

In posing the question in such a formal sense, it may be helpful to set out some of the sets of relations whose members might experience difficulty watching television in each others presence. It should be remembered that, as preceding material has indicated, while this list might present family viewing as impossible, it does happen. The advantage of this approach is that it provides the basis for showing that kinship relations, as well as gender and seniority, are all factors involved in the practice of household television viewing. The list sets out the relationships which I observed, or that were indicated in interviews, as ones which may offer some cause for thought or potential tensions in front of the set. It does not represent a set of impossibles but rather the extent to which such apparent difficulties are transcended through improvisation.

- grandparents and grandchildren
- fathers and sons
- fathers and daughters
- mothers and daughters, or daughters-in-law
- mothers and sons
- *jeth* and *jethi* (HeB and yBW)
- brothers and sisters (but dependent on their relative ages)
- brothers/sisters and their cousins (BS or BD, *bhatija* or *bhatiji*, or less commonly ZS/ZD *bhanja/bhanji*)
- *bahu* (SW) and *nanad* (HZ)

As the sketch of a day in the life of the Mishra household suggested, there are considerable periods every day when those at home can have relatively unhindered access to the television set. Towards the evening, when the house begins to fill up, claims to occupy the television room may render the question of access more problematic. In part, this arises as a problem regardless of what is on television. *Jeth* and *jethi*, or *bahu* and *sasur* (HF) are unlikely to share a common domestic space in non-televisual contexts in this household (cf. Sharma 1978). Who is in the house, and whether they want to watch, might be more crucial in the first instance.

Baira, the youngest brother, spent more time in the house than either of his elder brothers who, like their deceased brother, devoted much time to a famous centre of *pan* and political discussion in Lanka, or to political business in the university. As far as evening viewing is concerned this is important. Baira is *devar* and thus familiar with all his brothers' wives and can watch with them much more freely than his elder brothers might. They share the cushions in the viewing room, squeezing in where there is space. In terms of viewing choice they have more latitude - Baira would often have the final say over what is watched though others would express their preferences. And, when the choice is made, and all are sitting comfortably the scope for discussions about what they are seeing is wider. For Guddu or Munja, if they are watching with their *jethis* such talking back to the screen is harder if all are to remain seated comfortably. Guddu, with a sharp tongue and lively imagination, would prefer the space to verbalise his interpretations rather than have to keep them to himself. Pramat always said that this was why he enjoyed watching television in his own house, he felt free to make jokes or risqué statements though if he did so he would have to risk the wrath of his wife.

Munja is not the most avid of television fans and restricted himself to news and current affairs or to important cricket matches. His decision to watch presents the potential viewing community with a quite different scenario since, as eldest brother, Munja is in a relationship of avoidance to all his brothers' wives. Very often they did not even attempt to watch with him. When they did, they remained near the door, out of his line of sight and able to slip out when necessary.

As I have already emphasised, ^{their programme preference is,} Despite this televisual politics, based on who is in the house, who wants to watch, and what ^{is crucial}, the Mishras watch together and watch in combinations which provide the need for some sort of explanation, if only to an anthropologist. For the fact that *jeth* and *jethi* do sit and watch together represents a significant change in the patterns of relationships and one that is *not* repeated in every house. Mausiji, expressing this shift, as her sons often did, remarks that:

You can't watch television with your *jeth* (HeB) but now, among us, that has changed a bit, abandoning these observances (*bandhan*), the *jeth* sits down, she will sit down by his side and watch... the eldest brother is sitting there and so slightly concealing herself (*aar kar ke*) she [*bahu*] will sit down at the side. But she will watch, this is the change that has happened.

As well as remarking, in quite an explicit way, on the changes that have occurred around their single set, Mausiji also notes that this commingling of family members requires attention to seating that maintains the social distance common in non-televisual contexts. However, she also notes the willingness to share this small space: individuals in the household have learnt to reconcile their personal and collective desires to watch television with their personal understandings of social convention.

The meaning of the word *bandhan*, glossed as observance, stretches from bond or fetter, in a transferred sense obligation, to custom or daily practice. It merits further comment. As in *Rakhi bandhan*, and more general senses, the word means tie or connection. *Bandhan*, and cognate *bandhna* (cf. McGregor 1993: 693, 718) evoke restriction and the establishment of linkages, but also connections running through or between things animate or inanimate. When Mausiji commented that, in her house, they have abandoned the *bandhan*, or custom that patterns behaviour between *jeth* and *jethi*, she is suggesting that a tie which acts to separate the joint family is loosened and the family comes to be more united. Untying the *bandhan* brings unity to the joint family. Loosening the tie allows for more televisual flexibility between members whose *bandhan* (customs) usually acted to separate them.

The Mishra family made some explicit connections between their view of the joint family and television watching. This household, unlike many others I knew, had resisted the acquisition of additional sets. Guddu often said he would like a set for his own bedroom; Baira, since the web of relationships is less restricting from his point of view, made no such overtures. And, because his bedroom is on the ground floor next to the television room, he treats the set, after hours, as his own. Their mother was more explicit about the need to resist the temptation to buy more sets. Her comments might be read as a story she tells to account for the changes in behaviour between her sons and their wives, and of someone who knows of the experience of other households:

If there was a television in every room, if everyone had television in their room [bedroom] how would they meet?...at meal times the whole family eats together and talks about their day, their things, if it wasn't for television then everyone would live apart and no one would talk. That's a good thing...

Television, in the context of the joint family has the potential to act as a force of disintegration and/or integration. Whether the television will act in a way that undermines or unites a family is, for Mausiji, clearly a matter in the control of that family. For her the single set is a symbol of unity and shared viewing an act that keeps, or binds the family together but it can only do so once the *bandhan* has been loosened. Both as an object, and as a medium, television in the Mishra household, reflects and generates an integration that has required the reconfiguration of certain household relationships.

There is a choice, have separate televisions or watch what others are watching, if everyone has a television how will they meet each other?

Members of this and other families suggest that television and the culture of family segmentation they facilitate can result in a shift away from family unity. Parry (1979: 175-7) has noted that the disintegration and eventual partition of a joint family is often blamed, by brothers, on the incoming wives who are accused of fostering emotions which tend towards the conjugal not the whole. In an environment in which dowries invariably contain television sets, it is in this vein that televisions, like *bahus*, are seen to facilitate the disintegration of the joint family. It might be noted here that the Mishra household regard the adjustments to relationship patterns that a single set necessitates as a price worth paying to negate the need for additional

television sets. That the Mishras have reconciled social relations as they stand with a desire to maintain a quality of jointness (*sanyuktapan*) in their family suggests a rather strong view about what the joint family should be like.

To a picture of family unity and harmony in which relations of avoidance have dissolved and the gendered distribution of power has been recast an amendment should be added. What was often represented as a utopian compromise in which asymmetries between men and women, *jeth* and *jethi*, had thawed, in practice seemed to conform to more recognisable gendered and generational hierarchies within the family. The men of the household were more likely to have their way when it came to access and programme choice. And so, while in Mausiji's opinion it was certainly desirable that household members displayed some flexibility towards each other in televisual matters, the question of access often mirrored recognisable status hierarchies. So, Mausi could still ask:

We cannot watch together...we women have one serial we *really* like, the men come, the gents want to watch their thing, so how can we all watch together?

Talking about Monica, a much despised character in *Shanti*, she commented that this woman was one who spoiled everyone's home (*kisi ka ghar bigarne wali*). Shanti, whose husband Monica had stolen, had been brought down by her freedom, her ability to transcend the limitations of family life: "too much freedom for women is a bad thing". For Mausiji, this paradoxical requirement for both freedom and restraint or restrictions in the house was well illustrated by her own household's experience in front of the television set. Negotiation between family members and what is on television requires flexibility and respect, but, however generous and beneficent Mausiji was in these matters, it was her daughters-in-law of whom these requirements were most continuously expected.

Gendered power relations in the family are clearly central in patterning access to the set, and are also moulded by the allocation of household tasks. The preparation of food in the evening can mean that certain programmes are always missed. Baira's wife remarked: "I don't watch *Siti Halchal* (Siti Channel, 7.30pm) because at this time I am always in the kitchen". Programme schedules seem to reflect this, or at least

bear it in mind, so that it can be said that “nowadays if you don’t catch something you know that it will be repeated”.

Still, for those ensconced in a programme an unexpected guest can disturb their viewing, as Gita Srivastav (who we meet in the next chapter) describes:

It happens so many times, your favourite programme is on, but someone comes, some guest comes, or whatever it is, so *you* have to go, leave your programme and see to things in the kitchen. If you’re a *bahu* that’s your job, after the kitchen watch television. Do your jobs, make the food and after this watch television...that’s the problem, suddenly someone comes and you have to get up. If only you could say, ‘arrey bhai, I’m sitting down, someone else has gone and is seeing to it’.

Many men, perhaps keen to deflect attention away from either their own television habits or the dominance of television in the household’s life, suggest that television is “only for women” since “they stay in the house”. Men control patterns of access by (and in) their presence *and* by their absence. The tasks women perform for men during the day, limit their access on a daily basis. Knowing that they have to watch when men are out, because their access will be constricted in the evening, indicates a further restriction of their viewing behaviour. Those in total control of their house, conversely, have total dominion over the television set. One woman, married and childless, remarked that her whole day was free and that she talked to the television (*television se batchit karti huu*). Having moved in marriage from Bombay, where she had run her own boutique, this was a comment made with not a little irony.

The foregoing description and discussion has illustrated that while, on occasions, the Mishras unite around their television set, on others asymmetries in status are played out in front of it. By locating the practice of viewing in the context of household relations and with an eye to the temporality of daily life (and the flow of programme schedules) it has been possible to show relaxation of status relations *and* their reiteration. While the shared viewing of programmes has levelled some household hierarchies, albeit often temporarily, at other times they remain intact. Indeed, the issue of access to the television set can actually allow these hierarchies more emphatic expression. Yet the sharing of common (and rather cramped) space by *jeth* and *jethi*, almost inconceivable before television (and not replicated in other non-televisual

circumstances), suggests that television culture in the household has assumed an importance which justifies such changes in practice. Or, put another way, the benefits that are seen to arise from making compromises in front of the set, outweigh those of taking the more expensive, but easier option of buying more sets.

Negotiating shame for the whole family

The gendered nature of power distribution in the household patterns access to the television and continues to play a role once the viewers have assembled. This is experienced most intensely by families who have a cable connection and whose living room consequently becomes the site of scenes, behaviours and scenarios quite far removed from those from the life-world of their own home. However, the nature of programmes on satellite television is not always radically different from those on DD. It is generally accepted, however, that the satellite channels are more risqué even if one were to consider the popular ‘family five’ (Zee, ATN, Home, EL and Sony). Risqué here can mean funny, pushing the actualities of family life in a comic frame, or more racy and improper. *Ham Panch* (We Five) and *Tu Tu Main Main* (You You, Me Me) represent the former, *Swabhiman* (Self-Pride) and *Hasratein* (Desires) the latter.

The corollary of a bewildering array of choice across 32 channels is *sangarsh*, conflict, something which people contend (cable or no cable) is “the story of every house”. With entire channels often deemed unsuitable “for the family” or different members of it, the conflict over what is watched is often a matter of channel choice. However, one dominant feature of the contemporary television environment is the unforeseen way in which wholly suitable viewing can become quite unseemly. So, if a family or certain members of it are to sit together and watch television, attention must be paid to who is present, what is on, and what may be around the corner.

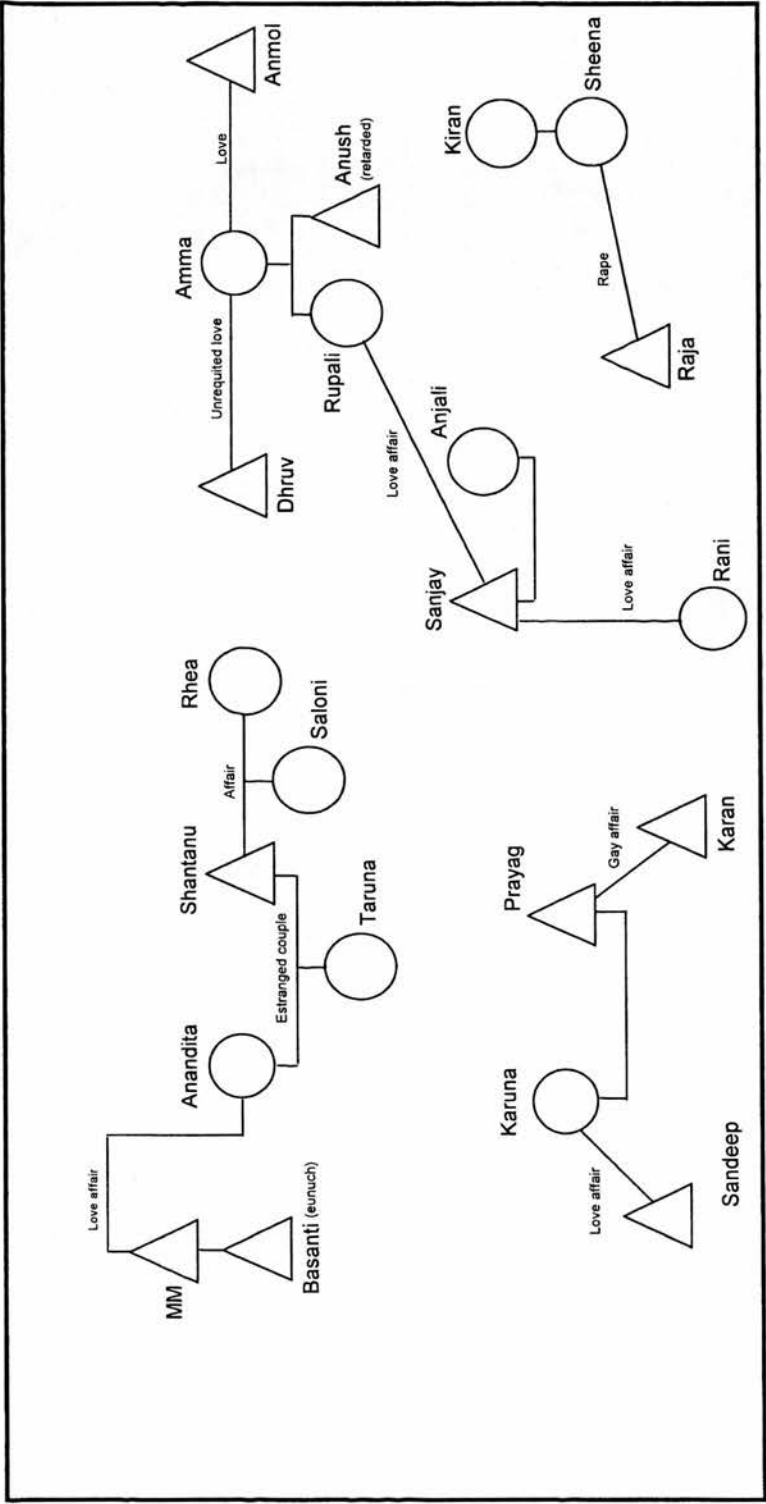
The creation of Shoba Dé, founder of various *filmi* magazines, author of steamy novels and doyenne of high society Bombay, *Swabhiman* portrays the world of the rich and famous of Bombay. Further removed from the ideals of the joint family than Shanti, its plot twists and turns between infidelity, divorce, custody cases and cohabitation with a cast of shameless (*besharam*) women.

Ham Panch is a sitcom based on the day to day happenings in the Mathur household. Ashok Saraf plays Anand Mathur, an upper middle class executive who is saddled with five daughters - three from his late first wife and two from his present wife Bina. Mixing emotions and practicality, Mathur manages to get out of one too many tricky situations. Bina Mathur is a content housewife obviously siding with her five daughters, sometimes to Mathur's embarrassment. The oldest daughter is into women's liberation. The second is only interested in the world of beauty, make-up and fashion. The third is the studious member of the household and is totally into books. Number four is the tomboy of the family and justifies her character by relating it to the injustices in society. Choti is the youngest of the bunch, who 'studies' more about the gossip and goings on from the film magazines than her books. Priya Tendulkar plays Anand Mathur's first wife, who is dead. Her photograph on the wall comes alive when Mathur is around and her comments on the events provide some of the comedy. Uncles, aunts and inquisitive neighbours are the other characters who strut in and out of the Mathur household. All in all, a fun serial which will have you rolling on the floor with laughter (Promotional literature).

Talking to Mausiji and others about *Swabhiman*, the title became a central feature of our discussions. It was the self pride, obstinacy and stubbornness of the characters which was the cause of their troubles and unhappiness. Marital breakdowns, arguments and split loyalties arose, in the mind of most viewers, through an inability to think about others: "They all have their pride and none are willing to bend (*jhukna*)". The recognition of different interests, predilections *and* statuses within the household, which Mausiji regarded as central to its happy functioning, were entirely absent in these fictional Bombay apartment blocks. Instead characters stumbled on their pride rather than admit the wishes of others. To Svetlana, in *Swabhiman*, Mausiji remarked, divorce means nothing because she is only thinking about herself.

In the Mishra household, sitting in front of the television with other members of the family cannot involve a solipsism that denies others' existence. A safe viewing environment has to be created in quite a continuous fashion by all present. It involves a willingness to bend that is premised on a recognition of the immediate social context. Svetlana's *besharm* behaviour, "changing husbands like clothes", is based on a negation of context and is only possible because she denies the ongoing nature of her relationships and the dialogue and communication that these involve.

The kinship diagram overleaf represents the relationships between the cast of a show on the Sony channel. There is no centre to it, no essential structure because each character, except the unfortunate children and spurned spouses, places themselves at the centre of their social world and acts accordingly. Sanjay is married and is conducting two extramarital affairs, one with Rani, the other with Rupali. Indeed Anjali, Sanjay's wife is almost the only adult character in the show whose relationships remain within some limits; all of the others have some extramarital relationship in the narrative past or present.



The characters and their relationships in *Jaane kahan mera jigar gaya ji*, Where's my sweetheart gone? (Sony TV).

Adapted from TV Today, November 30-December 6, 1996.

A comparison between this rather untidy social and moral universe and the certainties of life in the Mishra household seems valuable, if stark. It brings out quite clearly the 'real' and 'reel' forms of organisation that come into conflict when a joint family sits down to watch television and illustrates the moral disjunction between these two worlds. On the one hand is a cast of *besharm* characters, on the other a household in which *sharm* is a very tangible emotion which the shamelessness on television can easily provoke. A prime time show like *Jaane Kaha Mera Jigar Gaya Ji* evinces a rather different world from that inhabited by those to whom it is broadcast.

The ways in which the characters on *Jaane Kaha* interact with those around them is divorced from a consideration of their relationships with others. The web of relationships which patterns access to the Mishra household set are all important in the negotiation of such a show; these relationships entail avoidance, respect, familiarity, deference or joking. The interactions between the screen characters, individuals seeking the maximisation of their own pleasure without regard for the obligations and duties that their relationships involve, stand in obvious contrast to the more circumspect interaction between the community of viewers.

The *sharm*, or discomfort, that a show such as *Jaane Kaha* induces in a household of viewers is at once a shared and a personal emotion, both familial and individual. It can inhere to the whole community of viewers *and* arises from the presence of particular people within it. In another sense, the idiom of *sharm* acts as a pragmatic means through which on-screen behaviour can be judged. The ascription of shamelessness acts as a judgement about the propriety of the family and impropriety of the televisual other.

Sharm inheres to people in relation to their status or position and in this sense it is a relational emotion emerging from a dialectic between "inner life and social context" (Rosaldo 1980: 36). It is an idiom that informs judgements about social contexts and consequently guides peoples' acts in such contexts. To watch such a programme alone would be relatively trouble free. To be confronted by the immorality of Sanjay and the cast of *Jane Kaha* in front of one's mother or father, would be an entirely different matter. Talking to young men about this matter brought home the sense

that in choosing programmes (content) context was key. Frequently they would say that they did not watch Star TV, by which, it later became clear, they meant that they did not watch it with their parents or sisters.

Sharm is more than a signpost to social norms governing behaviour between people, but by bridging internal states and external action it goes some way to grounding the ways people interact. We can usefully adopt Bloch's comments on moral and tactical uses of kinship terms. Anxious to free kin terms from the sense that their primacy is in the denotation of rules, he argues that a kinship term is a "judgement on people rather than a label - it is a moral concept" (1971: 82). Across different contexts and to different people, the same term can be applied - the moral concept that the kin term presupposes remains constant. As Rosaldo reminds us:

A functional view that renders 'sentiments' the servants of 'society' has made us inclined to view affective life more as a 'sign' that points to social rule than itself a sphere of meaning that is as public and socially significant as are the names of kin. Unable to participate directly in the emotional worlds of our informants, we have failed to see that personal life is shaped by terms with social implications, and correspondingly that 'persons' are themselves 'constructed' in terms of shared understandings that inform the ways they act and feel (1980: 35).

Meyers notes that "if the emotions are relational, the relationships they constitute are given meaning and value by the social process in which they are embedded" (cited in Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990: 27). The arousal of emotions such as watching television reiterates the statuses/relations between members of the viewing community. With an eye to both the constitution of the viewing community and the content of the programmes it is possible to appreciate both the constancy and contingency that television viewing with different household members involves.

The symmetry and asymmetry of shame

The web of unseemly relations between characters in *Jaane Kaha*, and the more familiar universe of relations of a joint family watching it, gives rise to the need for negotiation between the screen and off-screen characters. *Sharm* is shared, and given

the unwillingness of the Mishras to purchase additional sets, there is a need to limit the frequency with which it arises. In some sense all viewers present contribute in attempting to shape a setting in which discomfort for all can be minimised.

Programme choice is important, and the presence or absence of family members plays an important role in these decisions. Baira, watching with his *bhabhis* can choose what he wants in the knowledge that they are unlikely to be embarrassed unless he shows discomfort. The presence of his mother alters the social equation and may require the changing of channels. Guddu is presented with a different scenario if his *jethis* are in the television room. He joked to me about the power he had to send them scurrying through an intentionally scurrilous change of channels.

To a large extent the creation of a safe viewing environment is a task that is borne by all. Women of the household cannot act unless in concert with their *jeth* or husband's senior kin. If Guddu is sitting in a way that prevents the women from taking a seat out of his line of sight, then access to the room is barred, although a marginal position by the door may be possible. If he is to respect their desire to watch television, then he may have to watch something he finds amusing, but ultimately worthless. *Ham Panch* was for him both of these, but the slapstick buffoonery clearly family viewing. The decision to watch television as a family requires co-operation between otherwise asymmetrically related members of it. The huge number of households in which there are multiple sets suggests that such co-operation is not practised everywhere.

Relations of avoidance are played out through the body and its location in social space and the body is key in negotiating shared televisual space. However, if to some extent those people expected to maintain social distance synchronise bodily position to render a space secure for shared family viewing, and this can be categorised as reciprocal, in other moments the burden to maintain the space is asymmetrically shouldered, as Mausiji remarked:

If very bad or dirty [programmes] come then something occurs in one's mind...then the women go out of the room, something is born, it is natural (or elementary, *buniyadi*) that shame (*sharm*) comes.

It is not that the feelings of shame and discomfort do not, in some way, affect all. Both mother and son are embarrassed when a character in *Hasratein* talks of the abortion of her unwanted love child. However, women are, by their own accounts and those of men, more likely to feel embarrassed and generally expected to do so and clearly there is a relationship here. The combination of questionable programme content and the co-presence of men and women renders the scenario untenable, but women are held responsible for negating this discomfort by leaving the room. Their *jeth* may feel uncomfortable but may switch channels rather than leave the room. He may do neither, for both admit that he too is embarrassed. This points to the general power relations between men and women within the family setting. *Sharm* can therefore be seen as a social and psychological emotion which is intimately related to distributions of power and social hierarchy.

In the sets of relations cited above there is a parallel to be noted between the seniority (be it cross-generational or cross-sex) and the asymmetry of responsibility for maintaining the relationship. The senior persons in any relationship expects the junior to render a violated context safe again. The asymmetry assigns the burden of the task, whether this is to evacuate the room or deploy the veil.

Televisual situations that raise topics that are not discussed between classes of people, be they mother and sons, father and daughters, *jeth* and *jethi* provoke a sense of shame, embarrassment and discomfort. It is not that these topics, be they abortions, divorce or sexual longing are repressed in all contexts, but strong ideas exist about the inapplicability of sharing them with these significant others. Television can strain the 'tacit avoidance' of such topics which is embedded in relations. Contemporary television is apt to confuse these private and public worlds, denying the distinctions between people on which relationships are founded. Their confusion leads to embarrassment, and television practice in the Mishra household must be seen to some extent as organised around the minimisation or negation of such discomfort.

Learning to deal with such threatening scenes requires that viewers use their familiarity with genres of programmes or of the channels. The search for family viewing is unlikely to begin on Star Plus, more likely Zee TV. With the programme

chosen, viewers can anticipate what turn a scene may take and consider what action is required. Unwanted scenes “eliminated by careful surveillance of one’s own vision” (Ossman 1994: 134), or other means, are scenes that thereby pass by without seriously disturbing the community of viewers. I would suggest that the denial of certain images by people demonstrates both social and self-knowledge and that those who resist such programmes do so on the basis of their position relative to others in the social contexts in which they watch television. Rather than demonstrating their innocence, it signifies their developed sense of self in relation to significant others. Viewers can distinguish the “merely playful from the morally perilous” (ibid.: 122) and this distinction is often made on the basis of who is with them in front of the television.

Foucault talks of the “little tactics of the habitat” (cited in Morley 1992: 271) and this is suggestive of the strategy and manoeuvring that is a central aspect of television viewing in the Mishra household. These tactics are framed by the understanding that shared viewing is preferable to segmented viewing in the bedrooms and allow for the possibility that asymmetries of gender and generation can be negotiated. Thinking in terms of tactics suggests manoeuvring within the relations of the joint family and that these tactics can themselves have some practical impact on the operation of these relationships themselves. If the ties of ‘custom’, *bandhan*, are loosened in some contexts there is the space for these untied and recast relationships to be transformed within the long term or in other contexts. The extent to which the *bandhan* of the household can be re-tightened, or not, has implications for the future of the household.

Televisual politics: the art of the possible

The aim of this chapter has been to chart the place of television within one household and its day and in doing so to consider the ways in which television viewing represents a continuity with, and change from, standard household practice. It has been shown that hierarchies of gender and generation are played out in front

of a single set but that, for the Mishra household at least, these hierarchies have been reconfigured in order that all may have some access to the set.

I began with a public protest against contemporary television and have focused on the household sphere. In this way it has been possible to illustrate that the concerns which motivated the politicians of southern Varanasi, and the idiom they used to organise their complaints, *sharm* or *lajja*, have a resonance in both public and private contexts. By historically locating ideas of *sharm*, with reference to the episode of Draupadi's disrobing, it has been possible to demonstrate that this idiom is central in judging the appropriateness or otherwise, of representations of women. Moreover, by linking this to behaviours within the household, and television practice, I have shown that more general questions about the appropriateness of television come to be considered in terms of relations between people. Such relations are themselves based around ideas of *sharm*.

There are evidently dangers, even if following the endless statements of friends, newspaper articles and other public activities that did so, of contrasting the bygone days of televisual propriety to the decadence of the present. This creates a disjunction between Indian and Euro-American notions of sexuality, of sexual prudery and permissiveness that arguably require much greater contextualisation. It also risks creating two distinct viewing communities, that of men and of women. Experience suggests this is probably untenable.

Friends complained that a BJP government move to outlaw the broadcast of '18' (*aatara wali*) films was a matter of regret for them *and* their wives. A couple who regard their recently acquired skills in the art of French kissing as something that would have remained unknown were it not for Star Plus are thankful to satellite television for this knowledge. Others who, quite regularly, watch 'blue' movies on their bedroom sets or after the rest of their family has gone to bed, would imply that any attempt to group men and women into separate viewing communities might be inaccurate. Two points need to be made, one with regard to the family and the other to the wider community.

Programmes or films that may excite men, or offer something risqué that is occasionally welcomed by couples, are likely to embarrass women watching with related males, be they father, son, or grandson. As I have shown in this chapter, access to the television, and reaction to what is on television, is patterned by the relations between potential viewers. Therefore my argument has not been to deny the possibility that much of the programming that is publicly criticised might actually be enjoyed, but that looked at in terms of the whole family, be it a joint family of four generations or a small nuclear one, such programming is regarded as deeply problematic. The issue of public representation of propriety and 'family values' or 'standards' is obviously important here, which leads to the second point.

The discussion of *sharm* illustrated that while it is a domestic, public and everyday idiom, denoting both emotions and ways of acting, it also has a profound versatility in representing unique Indian values. The properly modest body of the Indian woman represents values that are seen as under assault, and this body can be quite easily contrasted to those of the *besharm* (shameless) women on contemporary television screens. In domestic settings it is these representations or suggestions of shamelessness that, in a shared social setting, provoke concern. The importance of *sharm* is that it links notions of person to those of society and in front of the television screen these ideas confront each other in often problematic ways.

In concentrating on one (Brahman) family there is the risk that I have essentialised the responses of viewers to 'immodest' programmes. It is likely that had I chosen an upper-middle class household through which to explore family viewing a rather different account might have emerged. As Russell (1997: 13) points out, there is a sense that this class has moved on from the ('traditional') concerns of modesty, in an attempt to maintain cultural distance between themselves and those lower down the class hierarchy who are adopting their values and behaviour. From the perspective of Varanasi, and from my informants, the reply might be that it would *besharm* not to feel *sharm* in front of much contemporary programming.

A major concern of the chapter has been to establish that there is a dialectic between programmes and personnel which is that much more profound in the post-satellite

era. As Silverstone *et al* suggest, “media pose a whole set of control problems for the household, problems of regulation and of boundary maintenance” (1992: 20). The endeavour to develop uses of post-satellite television which do not contravene relations between people is the struggle to appropriate uses which do not contravene the “long term moral environment of the household” (ibid.: 22). Television viewing with all members of the household is far from impossible, but the limits of the possible are the limits of appropriateness. What has been implicit in this discussion has been the sense that, for the Mishras at least, television viewing occupies a place in the household important enough to justify such adjustments.

The following chapter will seek to show, with a similar body of material, that the difficulties faced and partially resolved by the Mishra household in front of their single set are not tackled by every household. The primary difficulty is that a television set speaks to all the household in one voice, without regard for the differences between members, and therefore denies the distinctions between them. The existence in many households of additional sets is evidence that the difficulties described in this chapter often find resolution through technological means. By developing an analysis that extends on the material described here, and provides a firmer theoretical basis for it, it will be possible to add to the material and analysis offered in this chapter and to take it in new directions.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Marital sets and conjugality: television as a member of the joint family

A man sits in a dining room waiting for his family to join him at the table. The grandfather clock is chiming eight o'clock and still no one has come for the evening meal. Checking on his pocket watch that they are late he shrugs, frowns at his Dalmatian and motions it to accompany him upstairs to see where they have all got to. Ascending the palatial staircase he hears sounds emerging from the first bedroom: his son is watching a boxing fight and sparring against a punch bag hanging from the ceiling. He shuts the door and continues along the passage to another son's room. Here he finds that the son and his son's wife are ballroom dancing to the accompaniment of an Arnold Schwarzenegger film. His dog now leading the way, he arrives at a locked door, through the keyhole of which he sees that his wife is dancing along to an American dance hall movie. Realising that his family is far from ready for dinner he shrugs and says "Well, I'm the boss, play on Videocon 25", enters his room and switches on the household's largest television set.

Introduction

This is not a description of any house that I visited in Varanasi, rather an advertisement shown on the local Siti Channel. It is a graphic illustration of the topic that this chapter discusses in detail: the place of televisions in relations between conjugal units, and in the life of the joint family. The contention of this piece of marketing, that households now contain as many televisions as there are married sons, is strikingly accurate. Television sets are a central (some would say *the* central)

item in the dowry that accompanies brides to their marital home (*sasural*) and these take pride of place in the bedrooms of these conjugal units. Why this might be necessary, and what additional televisions express about joint family life, are the two focal issues of this chapter.

This chapter takes as a central focus the place of television sets given in marriage, 'dowry sets', and the impact these have on practices of viewing within the household. The concern is to illustrate the motives underlying the giving of dowry sets, the ways in which they are used and how these uses are interpreted. I stress the importance of considering their meaning from the perspective of husband and wife, as well as the joint family at large. In keeping with an analysis of television watching as a practice moulded by social context, this chapter continues to outline household relationships; particularly those that involve in-coming women. It is then possible to illustrate the ways in which these relations guide the purchase, and subsequent employment of additional sets.

In the previous chapter we considered in detail how television content and the social context of the joint family need to be negotiated. The story of a household's accommodation with television, particularly since the advent of satellite television, is one of an active dialogue between programme content and the social context in which viewing occurs. Relations between members of the family were shown to be an important consideration in decisions about what, when and who watches programmes, and *sharm* or *lajja* to be one organising feature of household relations and of viewing. Implicit in this discussion was the notion that television watching has become an activity important enough to justify such negotiation.

Whilst the focus of the last chapter, the Mishra household, represent television watching as a force of family integration, many others told a story in which disintegration was the main theme. Satellite programmes reach the sitting room of a family with ages spanning sixty years and outlooks potentially as disparate. In this environment, an extra set can result in much greater flexibility, less embarrassment and fighting. Given the numbers of households which have more than one set, it would seem that some of these advantages are at play in decisions relating to

additional sets. Their deployment in the bedrooms of conjugal units speaks of shifts in the relationship between married couples and the rest of the household.

Marriage and dowry: the case of television sets

From the earliest days of fieldwork, when I was seeking a television set for myself, it was apparent that televisions often feature in the dowry prestation involved in marriage. The shopkeeper from whom I bought my set gave this the clearest (if somewhat exaggerated) expression: “these days there is no marriage without a television”. Although my subsequent experience did not exactly bear out this contention, it was obvious that they were one of the main items on the list of any family taking a dowry, and most wife-givers were sure that they would have to give one with their daughter.

Later investigations in television shops made it clear that stores were busiest during the Hindu marriage season and their owners complained of slack business at other times. On the hill rising up to Chowk, trolleys were to be seen piled high as televisions were transferred from *godowns* (warehouses) to shops. Coming down the other way, passengers clung onto their recent purchases tightly as the rickshaw increased in speed. Asking households when they had bought their set, the answer often given was that “it came in marriage, we did not buy it”, or that “our son received it, or took it, in marriage”. Others would comment, more wistfully, that they had had a colour set but it was demanded in the marriage of their daughter.

Many advertisements specifically locate their potential customers as those involved in marriage prestation. The number and style of newspaper adverts during the marriage season make this clear, as do the displays in shops around the city. Shopkeepers are given items such as paper turbans with which to adorn sets, indicating its suitability for a future son-in-law. Tempting advertisements in the press offer ‘marriage season deals’, ‘two-for-one’ specials or trade-in deals. The Akai

advertisement¹ below represents a good example of just such offers but also of the wide web of relations who may be called upon to provide for a woman's dowry.

Now in the marriage season the way to steal the applause isn't known to everyone. Those who have a son, daughter, brother or sister, or some other loved-one who is getting married will feel good about giving either a 21" or 14" colour television. So great are their features that *you* will want one too. Buy the larger set and you get the small one free!

Yes, for the marriage of your brother or sister's son or daughter (BS, BD, ZS or ZD) or *chachere-mamere bhai bahen* (FBS, FBD, MBS or MBD)² you can give one and if it is to your liking keep one yourself. Give them the 21" and keep the 14" set for yourself and put it in your 'drawing room'. If there is no marriage, keep both and simply use the excuse of a wedding in the future to justify your purchase.

Along with a refrigerator and washing machine, these consumer durables represent the trinity of goods that accompany the brides of middle-class north Indian households to their *sasural* (conjugal home). Those that give this complete trinity will invariably give a colour set, often a specific brand and model. This set may become the main family television, or will go direct to the bedroom of the new couple. Much depends on what sets are already present and their relative age or specification. Obviously not all grooms can demand a colour set (average price Rs.12,000) and have to settle for a monochrome set instead (cheapest Rs.3,000).

The marriage season is therefore a time when an additional set may arrive in a household and this may precipitate a movement of televisions around the house. A household may have their living room set upgraded, or a son may feel cheated that 'his' set is to be watched in this family room rather than his bedroom. On the whole it appeared that a son given a set in marriage would keep it in his bedroom. Either way, a household has another set and that opens up a fresh range of possibilities for the viewing of television by its members. As the last chapter showed, this may be a

¹ First featured in *Dainik Jagran* (18. iv. 97).

² It is noteworthy that by including male kin in the list of relations Akai seem to be ignoring the fact that dowry is received by the groom, therefore to suggest giving one in his marriage might be interpreted in two very different ways. Namely that they are trying to encourage (for commercial reasons) the widespread and more generalised gifting of television sets in weddings, or are including bridewealth in their account of marital prestation. For a discussion of the relationship/difference between bridewealth and dowry cf. Sharma (1993).

wholly welcome thing, allowing far greater televisual flexibility. However, as Mausiji's comments suggested, an additional set might also be seen to engender disunity in the household.



Plate 9:1. Television delivery during the marriage season, in Bansphatak.

The form of contemporary dowry, and its subsequent employment is at issue here. Dowry (*dahej*) is a major aspect of contemporary north Indian society, and a repeated topic of daily discussion. It is a highly contested institution, seen variously as a tradition, a sign of the corruption of Indian values, a 'right', or a bribe (*ghoos*). Some say that it is a demand (*mang*), others that they gave, or will give happily (*dil se/khushi se*). Graffiti around Varanasi during fieldwork expressed one negative evaluation: "Dowry is a bribe: Taking and giving dowry is a heinous sin (*mahapap*)". By the time of a return visit, a postscript had been added: "Those who do not take dowry are like God".

There are frequent reports in the local press of “dowry deaths”³ and household fires involving kitchen stoves and young married women are widely, and quite immediately, assumed not to be the ‘accident’ that the victims’ in-laws suggest they are. The high incidence of these ‘kitchen’ fires leads Srinivas to call the nature of the institution a “burning problem” of Indian society (1984: 7). The fact that dowry is illegal, acts as no deterrent to those who use marriage as a means to increase their store of worldly goods in an ever-more acquisitive society. Many attribute the dowry inflation, and the associated violence and usury, to a hunger (*bhukh*) in people that has been exacerbated by consumerism. To my mind, dowry was summed up most accurately by a young man at the Abhay cinema:

Dowry has become a tradition. Many people give it for show (*dekhane ke liye*) and many people have to give it in weakness (*mazburi me*).

The literature on dowry has largely taken two directions: one viewing it in terms of property (Madan 1975; Parry 1979; Sharma 1993; Tambiah and Goody 1973), the other as communicating something about marriage and the relations between affines (Sharma *ibid.*), although in this literature the two aspects are often treated together. As Roulet (1996) rightly concludes, the idea of dowry as ‘property’ has dominated. Given the thrust of my comments so far, it seems clear that an analysis of dowry in terms of ‘property’ is important, but so too its place in substantialising relations between affines. Patrons at Kali’s tea shop were clear that dowry had a role in status objectification, even though it might be quite a mystifying one: “Nowadays dowry is so big that no one knows whether people are rich or poor”.

Goody and Tambiah’s (1973) work proposed that dowry be considered as a means of property transmission at marriage, through which daughters and sons receive inheritance: “Dowry connotes female property or female rights to property which is transferred at a woman’s marriage as a sort of pre-mortem inheritance” (1973: 64). Dowry in this sense consists of movable property because the land, or house, that will be shared by men is not amenable to such transfer. Madan (1975: 237) argues against this idea of pre-mortem inheritance, suggesting instead that it is a substitute

³ For example: “On not receiving a television and money those greedy for dowry burn a bride”, (*Dainik Jagran* 8. ii. 97). “The demons of dowry greed take another life”, (*Gandive* 28. ix. 98).

for a woman's *lack* of inheritance rights. From his, and Sharma's perspective, it is problematic to think of dowry as women's property (whether as inheritance or not) for two reasons. Women, and sometimes their husbands too, do not have control over the dowry items (cf. Sharma 1993: 345) so it is misleading to term it their property. Secondly, rather than representing a share of her father's estate, dowry is more a reflection of the state of the contemporary marriage market.

The content of modern dowry suggests that the issue of property and its subsequent use and ownership is somewhat different where it involves consumer items. To my mind, it is clear that not only has the size of dowry increased, but also preconceptions about *whose* property it is have changed. The kitchen items, utensils and clothes and, if included, a washing machine, as well as miscellaneous domestic goods will usually become the property of the household. The bride's mother-in-law (*sas*), or the senior household female, will be in charge of their distribution (cf. Sharma 1993: 345). The cash given may be put aside for the couple, deposited in a bank account for their offspring, or become absorbed into the household purse. According to many, this depends on the nature and means of the head male of the household. Most acknowledge that the expenses he incurs during the wedding will be offset by this money. Women's jewellery is similarly distributed amongst the household and some retained by the wife. Grooms usually ask for some items, gold chains and rings, which are kept and owned by them. Variations in all of this are, of course, to be expected from household to household.

However, much that is given is conceived as conjugal property and its post-marital use seems to confirm this. A 'bed set', typically double bed, dressing table, *almirah* and perhaps stools and bedside tables too, will be used by the couple. Vehicles, perhaps the most potent symbol of modern dowry and the 'mobility' they afford, will usually become the exclusive property of the couple. However men, since they are less house-bound than their wives, will have more use of them. One brand of motorbike in particular, the Hero Honda, has become synonymous of a man's marital status⁴. It is the bike of choice for those who can demand one but cannot

⁴ One acquaintance noted the irony that a fashion show broadcast on television in aid of victims of dowry abuse was sponsored by Lakme (a brand of make up) and Hero Honda.

stretch their claims to a Maruti hatchback. Others may be able to ask for a cheaper vehicle like a scooter (e.g., Bajaj Vespa) or for those of lesser economic clout a moped (e.g., TVS Scooty). Refrigerators, like television sets, in terms of use and ownership, are quite ambiguous pieces of property and their designation as either household or conjugal items will depend on what is already owned by the household. One shopkeeper, one of the first stockists of televisions in Varanasi but now a fridge dealer, suggested that even more than televisions these symbolise conjugal independence or the desire for it. The storage in a bedroom fridge of extra food for one's own children or a personal supply of cold water, is a powerful indication of expressions of conjugality that lie at the heart of common-sense definitions of the joint family: commensality.

The questions around the transfer of cash are much more unclear, perhaps because this is seen as the most pernicious aspect of contemporary dowry. There is, as in other departments, an inflationary cycle in progress. I was told of a teacher whose daughter's dowry contained Rs.10 *lakh* cash with a further Rs.5 *lakh* of jewellery and household and consumer items. No one seems to know either where such amounts of money come from, or where they go, though it is often suggested that they pay for the previous or forthcoming wedding of the groom's sister.

Somewhat clearer is the phenomenon of "settling" in which, in addition to the movable property but in place of the lump sum of cash, the bride's family "settle" a groom in business. They provide a property from which the business can be conducted and the plant, or stock required for it. Commonly this may be a telephone booth (PCO), with a photocopier, or even a word processing centre. In the current climate of employment scarcity this represents to some a more appropriate offering. In terms of who owns such a business the evidence is mixed - earnings may accrue to the husband or be assimilated into the household purse.

The following dowry, presented at a Brahman wedding I attended in a village outside Gorakhpur, is quite representative of contemporary prestations. It contained a BPL colour television and washing machine, Whirlpool fridge, bed set, armchairs, steel almirah, 100 kg of sweets, sacks of rice, wheat and pulses, Rs.5 *lakh* cash and a

Maruti car. The wedding was between the son of a telecommunications officer from Gorakhpur, who was in the road haulage business, and the daughter of the principal land-owning family in the village.

The current socio-economic climate in India, and the changing content of dowry, clearly links dowry to the objectification of economic status. When dowry contained, as nostalgic grandmothers are apt to recall, clothing, cloth and gold or silver, it represented quite generalised transfers of property and value⁵. The comments of men buying a television set for their sister's dowry reflect the extent to which particular brands and/or models allow for greater versatility in communicating or acquiring status. A shop assistant showed them a colour Phillips set, "No", they replied, "a BPL has been demanded in marriage (*shaadi me BPL ki mang hai*)". Where consumer goods, variable in quality and status bearing capacity depending on brand, model, country of origin and changing style, are central to modern dowry, the demand for certain brands or models allows for a highly nuanced declaration of status. The difference between a BPL and a Phillips television is objectively marginal but the subjective distinctions given to those goods signify a more complex register of status. The ever larger world of goods has increased the evaluatory vocabulary of status tied up in dowry.

Socio-economic status can be gained or expressed through contemporary dowry, and this objectification of social status is seen locally as an important aspect of it. However, the items that a middle-class dowry contains suggests that dowry also allows for the expression (or possible enhancement) of another type of status; that is, conjugality. Are consumer goods, as advertising discourse often suggests, more conjugal in nature than others given in dowry?

Patterns of use suggests that some items, especially bedset, television, vehicle and refrigerator, are certainly more conjugal than others. Where there is a communal sitting room and separate bedrooms, patterns of deployment will vary from where

⁵ To them the longevity of the precious metals signified the enduring marriages of old, whilst a dowry television, (an item "that would be replaced in ten years"), the less healthy state of contemporary marriage.

the use of rooms is less strictly demarcated. The fridge and the television are especially significant because they allow for a formerly household activity to become more markedly conjugal. Television and food consumption are given the space to express conjugality rather than jointness.

Several writers (e.g., Mayer 1960; Parry 1979) have argued that the central symbolic and definitional feature of the joint family is the single hearth (*chulha*) on which the meals of the entire group are prepared. By extension, when the household undergoes partition, or when relations between male agnates become attenuated, additional *chulhas* and separate commensal units signify this movement away from jointness. As Jeffery *et al* put it, the *chulha* generates and reflects a commonality (1989: 28): the collective funding, preparation and consumption of food generates a sense of unity and reflects this unity to household members. There is then a contrast to be drawn between joint households, and their single television/*chulha*, and households in which there are more than one *chulha* or television set. Additional or dowry sets are often represented as akin to an additional hearth in that they generate and reflect a difference of interests, which can often be about more than just viewing tastes.

In the previous chapter I drew on Parry's (1979) observation that sons are apt to blame the disintegration of the joint family, and its eventual partition on daughters-in-law. In this respect, televisions are rather similar to these incoming women, for they too are often held to precipitate a certain disunity in the household. That televisions often accompany women into their conjugal homes and often remain 'their' property could therefore be seen as a combination of two potential forces of disintegration. The Mishra household, in which there are no dowry sets, suggests that a single set can allow for some familial integration⁶. Where households contain as many sets as there are married brothers, a segmented approach to viewing would seem to be the norm. Difficult choices about what to watch are removed when people can retire to their rooms to watch programmes they know would not be suitable for the household. Additional sets therefore come to symbolise conjugal

⁶ When Baira Mishra received a gift from his wife's family four years after his marriage he asked for a new scooter, not a television.

units within the household and allow the practice of viewing to engender segmentation rather than familial unity. They have both reflective and generative properties which are of a distancing, rather than unifying nature.

Before considering the practice of television in a multi-set environment in more detail it is necessary to discuss the relationship between conjugal units and the joint family household. In doing so it will be necessary to stress the gendered aspects of this relationship, particularly that between incoming women and other members of the family, and that between male agnates and each others' wives. The negotiation of the latter relationship, as Parry's observation on wives suggests, is important to the short and long term survival of the joint family, even if women are only blamed for, rather than wholly responsible for, its decline. An examination of some literature will set the scene for a discussion of dowry television sets in household viewing practice. In doing so a certain assumption is being made: that sets given in marriage represent something quite fundamental about the expectations of families and couples in the television age.

Women and wives in their conjugal homes

Television sets form a major element of dowry, and these dowry sets play a role in household life that is seen as similar to that of the women who bring them, that is, one tending to disunity. This is something of a male perspective but the position of women in the household, and also of the televisions, can and should be considered from both the perspective of men and women. It is necessary at this point, therefore, to consider some aspects of household life, particularly relations between the conjugal unit and the household, between women and their *sas* (HM) and more generally those between women and their *sasural* (conjugal home). A good place to begin is the highly popular programme *Tu Tu, Main Main* (You You, Me Me).

Tu tu, Main main

Sit back and join in the hilarious situations in which a modern mother-in-law (Reema Lagoo) and her daughter-in-law (Supriya Pilgaonkar) land themselves in. All hell breaks loose in the bizarre situations the wacky characters have to tackle. *Tu Tu Main Main* deals with the universal theme of a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship, their moments of gentle bickering and their moments of love and affection. Apart from the sheer entertainment value, this comedy serial imparts the definite social message of traditional values and emotional bonds which are relevant in the current disintegrating family scenario (Star TV promotion).

Although the broadcasters of this show may consider the relationship between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law as a universally problematic one, there is a good case to be made for suggesting that there might be a uniquely Indian appeal to such a serial. *Tu Tu, Main Main* was immensely popular on DD1, where it began its life, though like many serials from the national channel it was bought by Star Plus in order to give their channel more Indian credentials. Its incredible popularity alone suggests there is a specific cultural appeal to a show that centres on women and their daughters-in-law.

The title of the show stresses the way in which the *sas* always blames her *bahu* (SW), and delegates onerous task to her - You, You (familiar pronoun). The "I, I" hints at the *bahus'* (usually unverbaised) response to this constant bullying and bossiness at the hands of her *sas* (HM), "What about me?" Conversely, from the perspective of the *sas* the "I" of the *bahu* points to her suspicion that her daughter-in-law is attempting to put herself above the *sas* and therefore the household. The title of the programme therefore hints at both the hierarchy and the ambiguity in this central household relationship.

However, in folk and everyday mythology, the relationship between *sas* and *bahu* is elaborated in a way that lays far less stress on the comic and more on the tensions

inherent in it. As we saw in various examples in the last chapter, many women consider their *sas* overbearing. In the Mishra household, Mausi is viewed by her *bahus* to be relaxed and beneficent, but they also know the limits of this aspect and when its more serious side should be respected. The relationship between these women and their *sas* is one in which, as *Tu Tu, Main Main* implies, there can be a certain degree of friction between their interests and those of the household which the *sas* overlooks. Their *sas* supervises their daily tasks, and is therefore a point of contact between individual needs and desires and those concerning the household as a collective.

In the early marital years of a woman this point of contact can be one of considerable conflict because the practical and emotional requirements of the household must be put before those of the conjugal dyad. *Tu Tu, Main Main*'s popularity lies in its (albeit far-fetched) exploration of the tensions implicit in the need for a woman "to remain obedient and subservient to her husband's parents and other family members, and...to subordinate her desire for intimacy with her husband to his pre-existing bonds of loyalty and affection with his natal kinsmen" (Raheja and Gold 1994: 121). If, in often quite practical ways, the *sas* is responsible for ensuring that household interests rise above those of the conjugal unit, there is a more general requirement expected of *bahus* to suppress their ties of affection to their husband (and child) so that general interests, rather than those more conjugal, predominate.

Numerous writers have identified the ways in which the bonds of affinity that a wife represents are seen as threatening the unity of the joint family (Khare 1975; Madan 1975; Parry 1979; Sharma 1978). Khare, for example, goes so far as to suggest that dowry "compensates for the provision of an affinal bond (1975: 251), while Sharma (1978: 231) argues that *ghungat* (albeit rather partially) acts to hinder the ability of women to threaten the relations between men. In the sense that an incoming woman threatens the continuity and solidarity of male bonds, there is a requirement to navigate between her desire for conjugality (which her husband may harbour too) and the needs of the household.

Although Trautmann argues that *kanyadan* marriage (the gift of a virgin) represents the “patrilineal idiom of complete dissimilation of the bride from her family of birth and her complete assimilation to that of her husband” (cited in Raheja and Gold 1994: 75), this idea of total dissimilation or split has been contested, by Raheja and Gold (ibid.). Crucial here is a tension between a woman’s prior links to her natal village/family (*pihar* or *mayka*) and those that must be established in the conjugal home/village (*sasural*). Raheja and Gold do not deny the existence of such a tension, but suggest that the completeness of the dissimilation/assimilation in Trautmann’s account is textual, male centred and also overstated (ibid.: 76). Rather they argue that, from a woman’s perspective, this purported split is crucial in guiding resistance to the authority of her husband and his kin. At the same time this ideology of alienation is used by men to restrict contact with natal kin and it is central in post-marital power relations.

The ‘split’ that patrilineal accounts unequivocally stress, and Raheja and Gold seek to show are essentially contestable (ibid.: 29), are those between natal loyalties and conjugal ties. Trautmann argues that the marriage ceremony seeks to disassociate (and dissubstantiate) a woman from her natal kin so that she becomes ‘other’ (*parayi*) to them and ‘own’ to her conjugal kin (ibid.: 75). But, they argue, this is not total and is contested by women. Further, for her conjugal kin she represents both one’s own (*apni*) but also other (*parayi/dusri*). It is on this basis that they are arguing against the view of women as either/or, and that this status is affirmed in any totalising manner at marriage. As I will show below, dowry television sets are, from the perspective of married women, seen as similarly contested (neither ‘own’ nor ‘other’). Moreover, these sets also offer scope to women (and their husbands) to create a conjugal space in which their marital bonds can be highlighted.

My portrayal of the Mishra household offered some space for comment on the demands made by Mausiji and her sons, on the women of the household. We saw that in the maintenance of household unity, Mausiji saw a negotiation between conjugal and household demands as central. The place of children in this is of some importance because they are the product of the conjugal unit but this relationship must be muted - hence the need to allow one’s children to be scolded by others. It

has been noted by Vatuk (1982: 93) that the relationship between husband and wife must be similarly muted, not because it is seen as inappropriate but because it endangers the wider group by dividing loyalties. These two muted relationships are similar, as Das observes: “not only may the daughter-in-law make no claim over her husband, but should also leave special ties with her children unstressed” (1976: 14).

In the light of these general comments about relations between the conjugal unit and the household, and between women and their *sas* and *sasural*, the remainder of this chapter will argue for an appreciation of the place of television in these relationships, and their negotiation by women *and* men. Dowry sets in bedrooms solve some of the viewing concerns detailed above, but they also represent something conjugal as opposed to household, and are therefore often seen as somewhat inimical to the unity of the household space. To what extent do dowry television sets offer wives and their husbands a chance to transcend these relationships and secure conjugal freedom?

Das (1976), discussing the Punjabi kinship system (one which is cognate with Hindi-speaking areas of north India) discusses the way in which discourses of sexuality and biology are generally ‘backstaged’, that is kept out of the everyday domain of household life. This dramaturgical idiom stresses not the unacceptability of biological facts but the necessity that they are not given social, i.e., public, expression. The last chapter described how the practice of television viewing was one made fraught by the web of relations within the household, and the ease with which undiscussed topics and emotions appear into the sitting room. Watching television ‘backstage’, in the bedroom, allows programmes to be watched that would be otherwise unacceptable on the ‘front stage’ of the household. When women, especially young *bahus*, are especially vulnerable to instances of *sharm* even in non-televisual contexts (cf. Vatuk 1982: 95), a television in their bedroom provides a central tool for negotiating personal space where conjugal bonds can be nurtured and the limitations of family viewing negated. However, as the case of Gita Srivastav suggests, a dowry set in the bedroom does not always provide a husband and wife with an entirely private, and dominantly conjugal, space.

“We two, our one”: Dowry sets in conjugal spaces

Gita Srivastav had taken a television set with her in marriage five years ago. She lived for the first three years of her marriage in her *sasural*, before moving to rented accommodation with her husband and child. There were emotional and economic motives lying behind the decision to move, though she is clear that the emotional difficulties she experienced in her conjugal home (*sasural*) gave more than enough reason to establish a house with her husband. Her words capture the essence of issues discussed in the previous chapter but also suggest directions not pursued there. I quote at length so that we might get a feel for some of the details:

It happens a lot these days that you receive a television in marriage. In a joint family you put it in the ‘drawing room’ because everyone will watch television there. But in my house [*sasural*] everyone had a television because they had all received one in marriage so we could put them in our bedrooms. But in many houses even if you receive a television in marriage that does not mean that it has become yours, that because you have put it in your bedroom you have a right (*hak*) over it. It will not be only you that watches it, everyone in the house will watch it.

The joint family has come to mean that everyone comes together, sits and watches. It is different for those in whose houses there are four televisions and everyone has put them in their bedrooms; they can sit down and watch their programmes at leisure. You can’t watch every programme with everyone. So that is why you put it in your bedroom, that way it’s more convenient. Whatever film you watch, or whatever programme you really need to watch, you can watch at leisure. On cable there are those types of programmes that everyone together cannot watch...if older people are there then we [daughters-in-law] avoid the film or every [offending] scene. We have to leave the room.

Much of this portrait of power in front of the television set will, I hope, be recognisable from the previous chapter. We have the sense that, with the arrival of television, the joint family has come to mean something new; the entire family sit together. But we also have the idea, by now familiar, that many satellite programmes makes such togetherness somewhat difficult. In this light, as Gita suggests, “it’s more convenient” to have a television set in your bedroom.

What is of more specific interest here is the way that the dowry set is not a piece of property exclusively in the possession of the conjugal unit, but an object to which access is patterned by relationships of seniority in the household. Gita Srivastav certainly saw the television set as her and her husband's property, and when they left his natal home the set accompanied them. However, while they remained in her *sasural* it was an object that was not always under her control and, for this reason, her bedroom was not a space that offered total escape from the strains of household living.

Gita spoke at length about different scenarios in which her bedroom was invaded because of her set, but also times when it engendered a more conjugal space. When, after a busy day, she was relaxing with her husband in their bedroom, her *nanad* (HZ) might come in demanding to watch something on her set because others were in use. On other occasions, her *jeth* and *jethani* (HeB and HeBW) arrived in her room seeking a programme unavailable on the other set. This annoyed her intensely, but there was little she could do. In Gita's *sasural* her relationship with her *jeth* (HeB) remained one of avoidance. His presence in her room meant that she had to seek out alternative entertainment or engage in spurious time-wasting activities while he watched her television set. This often meant busying herself in the kitchen or helping her *sas* (HM) in any tasks. Her desire to watch television in the peace and quiet of her room was thwarted time and again by those she was unable to speak out against. However, on other occasions she and her husband could spend time alone, apart from his family, using television watching as an excuse to achieve this.

It seems therefore that several things may be going on here where a dowry set and the wishes of its 'owners' meets the joint family: 1) Gita used the word *pariksha*, examination, to suggest that members of her *sasural* were testing her nature or temperament (*swabhau*). 2) It may also be the case that the family members were denying the forceful logic of conjugal segmentation that the dowry set offered. 3) Perhaps these family members were reacting to a scenario in which communal watching on the family set was difficult.

For Gita, the first of these explanations made sense, especially in the context of the early years of her marriage. It is, she stressed, during this time when a *bahu* can expect her conjugal family to 'test' her temperament with attempts to strain the patience and tolerance of a woman who is not expected to answer back but swallow indignity with forbearance. Since all the conjugal units in the household possessed televisions, it seemed to Gita that they were deliberately testing her by demanding to watch *her* set.

The 'other' member of the family? Dowry sets as affines

When dowry sets endow the conjugal couple's bedset, are watched mainly by them, and are in this practical and symbolic sense theirs, demands to access them from other members of the household might be interpreted as an interrogation of the terms of ownership. In light of the foregoing discussion, there are grounds for thinking about dowry sets as objects of a rather affinal sort in two respects. They are received from affines and are the 'partial' property of a woman who is represented as both 'own' and 'other' (*apni* and *parayi*). Television sets and the practices they facilitate are also imagined as having an affinal tendency: that is, through their use by conjugal couples they highlight the marital bond. What is the marital bond in a North Indian context if it is not one between 'us' and 'others' (affines)?

This is, of course, the perspective of the *sasural* whose members might resent the television's tendency to 'disunite' the family, or harbour jealousy at the more conjugal televisual leisure it may facilitate. What of the perspective of women? It can be argued that a married woman may see her television, as the members of her *sasural* view her, as 'own' and 'other'. As Gita's account showed, her dowry set was never the inalienable property of her and her husband (although when they left the house it became just that). From the perspectives both of the members of the *sasural*, and of the women in whose dowry it was given, the television is at once both 'own' and 'other'. Its status is contested, not stable.

As Madan notes, the status of women in a house is always under transformation. She arrives as junior *bahu* (SW) and may die as senior household female, her status as incoming wife never disappears but is overlain by other statuses (1975: 221). A diachronic or biographical approach to an incoming dowry television reveals a similar transformation of its status, in which from the point of view of its 'owners' it becomes increasingly 'own' rather than 'other'. A husband's younger brother may marry, precipitating the arrival of another set into the household, a woman's *nanad* (HZ) may marry too, causing her incursions into the conjugal bedroom to become less frequent. In addition to the increasing number of sets there is also the enhanced status of the set's original 'owner', who having served her apprenticeship as junior daughter-in-law, and given birth to a child, will become more senior. She will demand, and receive, greater proprietary rights (*hak*) over her set and as her daily household duties become less demanding may have more time to spend watching it.

Tracing parallels between the status of incoming women and their dowry sets is, it seems, a rather suggestive way to view the biography of sets and the relationships between wife-givers and wife-takers that the television, as object and medium, is implicated in. Viewed as affinal objects, televisions seem to share many of the characteristics of the women that bring them. They threaten the household as a corporate body, can precipitate disunity between brothers, hinder conversation flow between members, and lead to arguments. They also allow, like women, the men of the household to blame their own disunity on some external or extraneous factor (cf. Parry 1979: 175). Television sets have a central role in a rhetoric of mystification that obscures personal animosities that may lie behind family tensions.

Like daughters-in-law, dowry sets viewed from the perspective of a *sasural* are objects to be domesticated, made a part of the household in accordance with its values. A perspective which anthropomorphises the technology enables a view of what people are doing to their sets, rather than what television sets do to people. Dowry sets, like *bahus*, must be made to operate in accordance with pre-existing relations between members (cf. Sharma 1978: 221). Relations between *jeth* and *jethi* are as central in fashioning appropriate uses of television as they are for the *bahu* in her attempt to navigate her conjugal household.

From the perspective of a married woman, dowry sets provide personal space in which they can secure some freedom from other members of the household. However, this space must be negotiated by her in a series of ongoing and fraught encounters with her *jeth* (HeB), *nanad* (HZ) or *jethani* (HeBW). The dowry set may reflect, and generate, some spatial autonomy for a woman away from the rest of the household and her affines, and this is why it may further embody the inherent tension in her position. What she may see as an object that can secure freedom for her conjugal relationship, her *sasural* may represent as one which symbolises, and through its use creates, too much conjugality. It is perhaps for this reason that Gita found that it was in front of her television set that conjugality came into conflict with her position *vis à vis* affinal kin and where she had to negotiate her husband's position *vis à vis* his patrikin. She could not be too demanding about her and her husband's personal use of the set because it would create tensions between her husband and his kin.

If there is not, as Raheja and Gold argue (1994: 73), a place that a married woman can properly call home, does television help a woman create a home within a house? And to what extent is this a truly conjugal space within the household? In Gita's case there seemed to be limits to the extent to which a television could offer conjugal viewing within a conjugal space. In a limited sense it may be possible to see the space created around a dowry set as one which may represent for women somewhere akin to the *mayka* or *pihar*, her natal home. A place where affinal kin are transcended, one is pampered (or can pamper oneself), and not expected to work - a place in which household responsibilities are set aside.

For both men and women, televisions in the bedroom seem to open up the possibility that the room will become more a personal or private space. Keshav, who expressed the desire for a television to complete his new room, was suggesting that the television may have a key role in the symbolic vocabulary of conjugality. It would seem to symbolise, par excellence, the one space in which a conjugal unit can forge alliances. As an object alongside the dowry bedset, tapes, cassette player and personal miscellanea, it completes a collection of conjugal goods. For Keshav, who never received a dowry and did not possess any of these other items, the television

was his first concern. The other dowry items could wait but it was the television that held out the best chance for forging a space for himself and Rita. His room in the newly built Sahni home was far from a conjugal haven but he was aware, from friends' experiences, of the potential a television might have. His expectations are those of someone less affluent than many other families I encountered, but still suggests two related points. First, that differentiation of interests within the joint family seem to be gaining some recognition. Secondly, that in urban areas at least, conjugal bonds are increasingly acknowledged. Dowry sets seem to reflect and contribute to these processes.

Given that, in the early years of her marriage, the position of a woman is one made fraught by relations with her husband's kin, perhaps the television is seen as an essential element in the dowry for just this reason. The wife-givers, realising the tangible benefits a dowry set may have for their daughter or sister, might be only too happy to give a set, whether it is a Phillips or a BPL that is demanded. In the household, the need for some space and intimacy for the marital units is best given expression by taking a television in dowry and allowing the couple to put the set in their bedroom. Having said this, it is reasonable to ask why, if televisions are seen to embody forces of conjugality, and liable to fracture the jointness of the joint family, they are the object of choice in most dowries. This question is even more pertinent in an environment in which the people talk of the 'disintegrating' joint family as symbolic of general cultural malaise.

Aside from the two points made above with reference to conjugality and differentiation of interests this problem seems hard to resolve. However, it might be noted that television represents an exogenous force which can be blamed for causing change in which larger socio-economic or cultural factors are involved. In this sense, televisions, like in-coming women, represent something akin to scapegoats for declines in family unity. Television, like other technology, is in such instances being represented as an all-encompassing 'cause' in a manner which negates all other questions about it and its use (cf. Williams 1974: 119-30). The Mishras, in holding out against the urge to buy additional television sets, seemed to realise that the effect

of a television is conditional on its uses. It can be used to foster unity amongst brothers and their wives and is not, in itself, a force of disintegration.

In the light of the previous chapter, sets in bedrooms allow for a much greater flexibility of viewing when, as Gita put it, “on cable there are those types of programmes that not everyone can watch together”. So, if the dowry television as an object symbolises conjugality in a conjugal space, the television as medium enhances the ability of television to express conjugality as opposed to the corporate household. For the bedroom, as many men would recount, is where the late night offerings on Star Movies can be enjoyed, among much more intimate company than that represented by one’s senior patrikin or one’s wife’s *jeth* or *sasur*. It is often, but not always, the bedroom set on which more direct control over what is watched can be exerted. And, with an abundance of channels, the stated desire to watch something on another channel can mean that there is always an excuse to disappear to the bedroom, for understood in such a statement is the fact that what may be seen is not suitable for the entire household viewing community.

Dowry sets are dominant symbols of conjugality as technological extensions of the marital unit. In this sense, as we have seen, they are highly welcomed, and often resisted, but always somewhat contested. The words of one woman always stuck with me “In our house (*ghar*) there are four televisions and in each house (*ghar*) people watch what they want”. Using the word *ghar* for both the material structure of the building and to describe the existence of the families of her four sons seemed a very pointed way of expressing this extended sense of segmentation that televisions can allow to take place. This household had not partitioned in the sense in which this is usually understood (Parry 1979; Mayer 1960) - they were still cooking at one *chulha*, (or in this case a large gas range), and doing so with a shared budget. However the position of conjugal units in relation to their respective televisions represents the almost total televisual segmentation of the household.

Beyond the bedroom: a dramaturgical reading of television.

The third possible reading of the scenario in which members of Gita's *sasural* came to her room to watch television was that they wanted to view a programme which they could not share with other members of the household, maybe younger children or their parents. Additional sets allow for the segmentation of viewing, i.e., different members of the family, watching different programmes, at different times, in different rooms. From one point of view the content of programmes, unsuitable for all, requires that this be the case. From another it is less a matter of television content but the social context that requires segmenting. Considering the key structuring relations of the household, those patterned by gender and generation, from a fresh angle allows us to explore how segmented viewing reaffirms differences between members of the household that are central to its organisation but are endangered when all sit down to watch together. From a third, more culinary perspective, segmented viewing is a practical response to the different routines and preferences of a joint family. Just as food must be prepared with regard to the different timing of different members, so too must television access and choice bear the different routines of the household members into mind.

Das, in her (1976) discussion of Punjabi kinship, uses the idea of back and front stages to refer to the discrete lines between biological and cultural aspects of kinship, and outlines how relations between people pattern access to, or even discussion of these stages. In other words, determining who one is to some extent determines what information one has access to. Adults know what goes on in bedrooms and what backstage actions led to them entering the world but such information is not divulged to children. Similarly, discussions of a similar nature may occur between sisters, but rarely between a brother and sister.

Patently close relations between husband and wife rupture the idea that the household interests come before those of the conjugal unit. Similarly, links between mother and child are suspended so as not to contravene the expectation that the whole household has a role in parenting. That these links exist is neither denied nor repressed but rather not given social expression on the front stage. Thus Vatuk

notes, a woman might feel embarrassment (*sharm*) if her young daughter, oblivious to the expectation that such bonds, whilst natural, are not given expression, calls her *ma* (cf. 1982: 94-6). The fine line between front and back stage has been shattered.

Das' discussion of household life is useful to the extent that it highlights the ways in which behaviour between people is dependent on social context, or more accurately, who they are in a specific context in relation to a significant other. However, television has a tendency to introduce knowledge into a gathering of people (on the front stage) which it would be unlikely for all present to share (i.e., back stage topics). In the age of satellite television the informationally glib television can reach all members of a household sitting in front of it, and thus the partitioning of certain types of information according to age, gender or status *vis à vis* significant others is difficult.

Meyrowitz, bases his theory of electronic media (1985) on a reading of Erving Goffman's (1969) work on social situations similar to that of Das. For Goffman, situations, settings and contexts shape and modify behaviours, or the roles people assume in different stages (what he terms regions). His famous example of waiters back stage in the kitchen, and front stage in the restaurant indicates how roles are variable according to the socially defined situation. Behaviour acceptable in the kitchen is unacceptable in front of the diners (1969: 101-3). What Meyrowitz argues is that this model works well, but only for face-to-face interactions (1986: 36): it denies that social situations are as much informational as they are physical constructs.

Take away the wall dividing the restaurant from the kitchen and the social situation has changed too. Back stage and front areas have become merged and the patterns of behaviour in each are observable to the others. A telecom system between the kitchen and dining room might effect a similar transformation. Those dining have informational access to what is happening in the kitchen, just as if no wall separated the two rooms. Social situations are therefore, Meyrowitz argues, shaped by flows of information, not just by physical characteristics (*ibid.*). The line dividing back stage from front stage is informational and physical.

This approach seems valuable in looking at television watching in a joint family where social situations shape the act of viewing in a very pronounced way. That is, knowledge of who is in the room, and how they are related to each other is of prime importance in deciding who will leave, what will be watched and how people will sit. In front of the television in the shared space of a family living room, the situation is changed when all have access to the same information regardless of their social status, age or generation. Adult topics become accessible to children, or matters not ordinarily discussed between siblings, offspring and their parents, or those in relations of avoidance, are brought out amongst them by television. Backstage topics, to be discussed only between certain relations, invade the front stage setting of the sitting room.

Sushila and her husband are arguing about what is on television. There are no elder kin, for only their daughter lives with them. Sushila is, by her own admission, a serial addict and particularly likes *Hasratein* (Desires). Her husband complains that it is worse than useless (*faltu*), it is dirty (*gandī*). He flicks over with the remote control⁷, she gets up and changes back, standing in front of the set so that he cannot reverse her change. Their daughter is in the room and this is what particularly irks her husband. Savi, the fiercely independent woman at the centre of *Hasratein* is having an extra marital affair. The show is one of quite blunt physicality. He reminds his wife that their daughter is in the room, that they should watch something more suitable and that they have a guest. It is the guest and their daughter who are most embarrassed, not only because to be privy to an argument of hosts or parents is uncomfortable, but because the unspoken knowledge that such programmes embarrass certain gatherings of people has been made explicit through this avoidable disagreement. Perhaps quite unusually, the parents rather than the children have been responsible for the dissolution of the barriers that normally extend to separate their worlds and that children are normally responsible for shattering.

⁷ It was often suggested that remote controls really became necessary with the advent of satellite television. This is not just because prior to this were no other channels to switch too, but that immediate defence against embarrassing scenes is at hand.

The maintenance of a division between front and back stage regions can be viewed as informational (based on knowledge) and physical (shared as opposed to conjugal space). The preceding chapter sought to show how the practice of viewing was informed by relative social identity. Here, with a focus on dowry sets in conjugal spaces, it might be argued that these sets allow for differences between people, and the different social knowledge that these differences depend on, to be maintained. Television routinely disturbs this fine balance but additional sets can restabilise it. Whilst much viewing practice in the household is organised around such boundary maintenance in front of a single set, additional televisions in bedrooms physically reconstruct such boundaries.

The attitudes expressed towards satellite television made clear that the social context of viewing involved more than *where the set was* being watched but *who was present*, though the two are intimately related. Viewing choices were very often qualified by the addendum of who cannot be in the room to watch that particular programme. They expressed the fact that some topics are for sharing with some kin, others for studiously avoiding; that some things are shared openly by all, others are not. These statements repeatedly testified to back and front stage arenas in family life.

The meanings of backstage and front stage employed in this analysis are both physical and informational entities, spatial and affective. Conjugal bedrooms are backstage areas, the sitting room definitely front stage; relations between brothers are open, joking and sharing, those between a *bahu* and her *jeth* or *sasur* (HF) those of spatial and social distance. Kinship relations mark out those members of the household who can discuss certain topics or watch television together. Kinship itself represents a pattern of access to social information. What people know about each other and the physical nature of their relationship is patterned by kinship.

A situational approach is based on the assumption that actions are shaped by a knowledge of the situation. What sort of topics can be discussed and by whom is founded upon a sense of how people are related to each other and who else is present. Similarly what is watched on television is based on a comparable appreciation of context founded primarily on kinship. Kinship relations have both

physical and informational aspects. Relations of avoidance require both informational and physical distancing, and the necessity to watch television as a household can mean that both aspects of distancing require suspension. Additional sets allow for the physical and informational distancing to be maintained, and for the maintenance of relations that are premised on notions of status difference reflected in both physical and informational ways.

Televisions can operate in a way that disturbs the equilibrium between who people are and what they know, between social position and social knowledge. Television sets engender informational proximity between people who otherwise keep their knowledge of such things to themselves. Parents and their children know that people kiss, that they themselves are the products of more than just kissing, but they keep discussions about such things to themselves. Satellite television makes such separation difficult. Additional sets arrive in part from a recognition of the need to keep these domains of knowledge discrete. They reaffirm the need for a backstage arena and help create one.

Guddu, Pivati's *jeth* has come to her house. She extricates herself from the room via the veranda, leaving her husband Prammat, Guddu and myself to talk. As so often happened, conversation turn to *kam* (literally work, euphemistically sex). The range and depth of the discussion fascinates contributors from both cultures gaining insight into the sexual proclivities of the 'other' until Pivati, making tea, expresses distaste: "quiet, don't talk dirty". The physical separation required of her did not necessarily entail informational seclusion.

In some sense the seniority of men allows them to cause embarrassment to women, and as we saw in the previous chapter, in televisual contexts the women know when to, or that they should, leave. Our conversation was conducted in the knowledge that physical and informational seclusion are not necessarily synonymous. From the point of view of women, about whose *batchit*⁸, conversation, I must claim ignorance, it

⁸ Raheja and Gold (1994: 42) note that *batchit* is used as an euphemism for sexual activity. A much fuller discussion of women's songs and talk on these issues is to be found in this

seems more total physical and social seclusion is required to conduct such conversation. It could be safely assumed that if in the scenario above, the same men had overheard women's conversation the women would have felt *sharm*.

It might be noted however that in ritual settings, e.g., at weddings, it is the women of the wife-givers who are required through their bawdy songs, to insult the groom (and the size of his manhood). At the *tilak*⁹ ceremony, the women of the wife-takers abuse the gifts and the men who have brought them. The 'game of honour' is largely conducted by men and women are called upon to express what this code does not allow to be articulated, a mutual distrust of the other party. Women are employed to purposefully disturb the front stage of these ritual occasions, bringing the shared backstage emotions or opinions to bear in highly public ways. This intentioned interrogation of front stage and back stage is, I would submit, sanctioned in some ritual settings but rather more unwelcome in everyday contexts.

Watching together: evening news, evening meals

Given that this chapter has talked of conjugal segmentation, informational and physical separation, and of the over bearing difficulties inherent in household viewing in the satellite age, it may appear that I am following Bailey (1958) and Epstein (1962) in arguing that the joint family is under siege. However, as Gita Srivastav put it "the joint family has come to mean that everyone comes together, sits and watches". Whilst the number of sets in houses, and the ways they are used, suggests that television segmentation is the norm for multi-set households, there are obviously occasions when joint family viewing is joint. Many household, even those that possess many sets, eat the same evening meal and do so around one genre of programme: the evening news. Indeed, the claim is also made that this is new, that before satellite television members of the household ate their evening meal in shifts, and rarely sat down together to do so.

volume.

⁹ The *tilak* ceremony solemnises an engagement.

Evening news and views.

DD1 shows news in Hindi at 8.50, followed by news in English at 9.20. EL TV broadcasts the Zee TV bulletin at 8pm. Star Plus follows with its own news show at 9pm, while Zee repeats its bulletin at 10pm. For those seeking more informed debate and in-depth analysis DD 2's *Aaj Tak* offers such fare.

As well as more, and more detailed events from around India, they give viewers glimpses of events from elsewhere in the world, highlight the serious, tragic and comic. Most of these shows end with short clips of "other parts of the world in a few glances": skateboarding dogs in Japan, knobbly-knee competitions from Ireland, mango-eating contests in Delhi or the Christmas lights in Oxford street. Closer to home Siti Channel and CTV offer digests of local city news: religious, municipal, criminal, political and topical coverage that links the home to a much closer and familiar world. There is something for everyone, though some still admit to avoiding the news

It is not only the quantity of news that has changed since the advent of satellite television. A qualitative change in content has seen the 'visual radio' news of DD competing with more rigorous and interrogative accounts of daily events. A familiar criticism of DD was that it represented the government as it wanted to be seen, relaying, day-after-day, features of garlanded ministers opening conferences or inaugurating state projects. The private news shows are less hindered by the necessity to please those in power. While some may argue that these changes amount to the trivialisation of news and public discourse they have meant that news is now more entertaining, if not exactly entertainment.

This change in daily national (and international) news makes events and personalities more familiar, brings them closer to home. However, in light of the discussion in chapter five, on televisual access to the city of Varanasi, we might also consider how the existence of such local news, and its timing early evening, relates to household participation in the daily life of the city. In that chapter I argued that Siti Channel news allows for greater, if somewhat vicarious participation, by women in the

predominantly male activities of the (political) public sphere. Moreover, although the domestic and public settings are marked by informational exchanges, local television has allowed for such exchanges to become more pronounced.

Often, in houses with sets in bedrooms, the television in a common family space was the one around which a household would start their evening viewing, beginning with the news as they ate their evening meal. In light of the material and analysis presented in this chapter, particularly the parallels and contrasts drawn between the hearth (*chulha*) and television set, this household practice seems especially significant, not least because it is viewed as novel. I have shown that the hearth, and the food produced on it, is central in common-sense evaluations of the joint family. Moreover, where there are several household televisions, these can reflect and generate the segmentation of the household. Since the introduction of more entertaining evening news programmes, more obviously aimed at all family members, the eating of food and the watching of this genre of programme by all the household would seem to counter the tendency for televisual leisure to become segmentary in nature.

Conclusions

The film that I want to watch, they don't want to watch. There are many channels so people have to keep lots of television sets. If many people are going to watch together (*miljul*) and watch with some adjustments, then you can have one television.

With this comment, Lata, a neighbour of mine in Shivala, expresses some of the ground that the last two chapters have covered. We have seen how the television set, or sets, are implicated in a range of social, spatial and temporal contexts in the household, and how viewing practice is guided by ideas about the household and members' relations with each other.

In the previous chapter I commented on Mausiji's use of the word *bandhan*. This word has a complexity which allows it to become instrumental in thinking through

television viewing within the joint family. In the sense in which Mausiji used it *bandhan* referred to custom or observance. The relationship of avoidance between *jeth* and *jethi* was the particular context in which she used the word. However, cognates of *bandhan* have the sense of ties and restriction; the ceremony of *Rakhi bandhan* 'ties' brother and sister together. Mausiji said that when her joint family disregarded the custom (*bandhan*) between *jeth* and *jethi* they were doing so because it acted to keep the family apart, to separate some members of the family because they could not watch television together. Untying the 'custom' allows for different or transformed relationships to develop and for the Mishra household to create televisual unity. The customs that bind the family are also ones that, in televisual contexts, can serve to disunite them. By loosening these ties, or by rethinking them in some practical contexts, an increased sense of unity can be forged.

This double-meaning of the word *bandhan* is, I would argue, a valuable way to consider joint family life because it suggests the practical, everyday aspects and a deeper ideological sense of what the joint family means. For the majority of joint families that I knew, the *bandhan* of avoidance between *jeth* and *jethi* was a marked feature of everyday interaction. Similarly, the sense of ties and unity was equally strong, they lie at the heart of evaluations of joint family life. Indeed, as we have seen, although 'joint family' is the term accorded to many different ways of living together, stress is most often placed on 'unity'; be it commensal, residential or televisual. There may be aspects of daily life that are not shared or united, but the tendency is to stress the togetherness. Mausiji could thus suggest that arguments between brothers about wives, or children, could allow for unity or jointness to be highlighted. They provide an occasion for members to remind themselves, and others, that they live as a unit: individual and common interests must be matched.

One practical and symbolic element of the household around which jointness is expressed and generated is the *chulha*. I have argued that there is value in drawing out some contrasts and parallels between *chulhas* and television sets. The single *chulha*, practically and symbolically expresses the unity of the household. The establishment of additional *chulhas* represents a quite definitive statement about the household and its progression through the developmental cycle. Televisions can be

used in a way which brings the family together *and* stresses different interests and tastes. The majority of family viewing may be done on separate sets, but some old films or the evening news, might occasion a shared family activity. Therefore, televisions can express and generate both unity and disunity, and would seem to be more flexible in this respect than a *chulha*.

Whatever transformative space the dowry set in the bedroom may provide for a conjugal unit, the coexistence of multiple sets and single hearths suggests that the hearth, not the television, is the object around which home is defined. So although there are grounds for drawing parallels between the household hearth (*chulha*) and television sets there is one obvious contrast. Additional sets represent somewhat less distinct statements about the 'jointness' or otherwise of the household, and what they express is much more dependent on the time of day, available space, programme content and the presence or absence of different household members.

While there may be useful parallels to be drawn between the hearth and the television there are clearly interpretative limits. However, by drawing out some contrasts and parallels between commensal and televisual activities, within a consideration of the place of marital sets and conjugality, it has been possible to think about the joint family in new ways.

It would appear, given the tenor of Gita's comments, "the joint family has come to mean...", that fresh ways of thinking about the family are necessary. As I have argued throughout, the joint family is more than a way of living, and its importance stretches far beyond the questions of definition. It is of immense symbolic importance to its members in their everyday lives and an inalienable part of discourse about India. Suggestions that the joint family is disintegrating do not just mean that couples are living in apartment blocks with their children. They are intended to mean that a sense of Indian uniqueness and particularity is in danger. I have no evidence that the Indian joint family is breaking up, and I doubt whether those who complained to me that it was have any either. The literature on the subject (e.g., Madan 1993; Parry 1979; Uberoi 1993) makes it clear that such talk of disintegration is nothing new.

What I have been concerned to do, over the preceding chapters, is to link up several interrelated features of joint family life and discourse about it. Satellite television, exemplar of external cultural influence, is seen as destabiliser of the joint family, but others argue that the joint family is the bulwark on which India can rely for defence against such influence. The joint family is where most television is watched and programmes often show a world of interpersonal relations which differ very highly from those of the household viewers. The way in which families watch television is based on ideas about the relations between household members. However, as this chapter has showed, it is less the programmes and more the existence of additional sets which provide the impetus for segmentation within the family. Or, put another way, the presence of an additional set, can allow for the emphasis of already existing bonds. Those between husband and wife are given expression by *their* television in *their* bedroom.

Programme content is important, but rather than use this observation as a cue for a textual analysis I have sought to consider why it is that content is so important and what television does (or people fear it may do) by delivering some programmes to all people at the same time. By using a dramaturgical idiom in thinking about the household, and the media, it is possible to unpack content and context and how they interact. It is the 'control' of this interaction that guides much viewing practice within the household, a control which is based on keeping certain types of information separate and the acknowledgement that contemporary television does not always allow for such informational separation. The relations between children and adults, between *jeth* and *jethi*, sister and brother, although qualitatively different share one similar feature. They are based on an informational discrimination and the understanding that this be maintained.

The man in the advertisement with which I began this chapter might have been regretting the fact that his palatial house was full of television sets. Although his other family members seemed more concerned by televisual, rather than commensal activities, I have no doubt that its members would consider themselves residents of a joint family. It may well be, *pace* Gita Srivastav, that the joint family has come to mean that everybody watches television separately and eats together. It is more than

likely that, whatever definition employed, the joint family is still regarded as joint by its members. So whether they consume their daily bread or daily television as a whole or separately, whilst they live under one roof they are unlikely to consider themselves anything other than joint.

CHAPTER NINE

Children and the adult world of television

The most important thing we've learned,
So far as children are concerned,
Is never, NEVER, NEVER let
Them near your television set...
In almost every house we've been,
We've watched them gaping at the screen.
They loll and slop and lounge about,
And stare until their eyes pop out...
Oh yes, we know it keeps them still,
They don't climb out the window sill,
They never fight or kick or punch,
They leave you free to cook the lunch...
"All right!" you'll cry. "All right!" you'll say,
"But if we take the set away,
What shall we do to entertain
Our darling children! Please explain!"
We'll answer this by asking you,
"What used the darling ones to do?
How used they keep themselves contented
Before this monster was invented?"

from *Advice on Television* - Roald Dahl.

Introduction

In 1988, a local journalist writing in *Aaj* asked "Where is our young generation going?" (Gupta 1988). The danger to the impressionable youth was, he suggested, Western culture peddled by media, and television in particular (even in these largely pre-satellite television days). The influence manifested itself, he argued, in the (non-vegetarian) foreign food and (alcoholic) drink the youth consumed, and the 'hippycut' hair and tight jeans they sported, all of which he regarded as antithetical to Indian values. The dominant tone of his polemic is one of desperation, implying that if the future of the youth cannot be safeguarded, then the future of India will be bleak.

Over the course of the preceding chapters the focus of discussion has moved from public contexts to domestic settings. By focusing on children I attempt here to draw links between these two different contexts. Television, because it critically informs perspectives on the home and the world, and because for many it is seen as the prime corrupter of children, is at the centre of the discussion. The question asked by this journalist was a familiar one that accompanied, explicitly or implicitly, many of the discussions that I had during fieldwork. I will outline some of the ways in which television is linked to this discourse about corruptible children, but what I will also do is appropriate Gupta's question in a more literal sense. The question, 'Where is our youth going?', will act as a rhetorical device which frames an account of the relationship between the house and the outside and the place of television in this relationship.

In this way I use the word 'outside' in two distinct yet related senses. One is the outside in a physical socio-spatial sense, the streets and alleys beyond the house. The other, in respect of television, is the 'outside' as a foreign, external and adult world against which children should be guarded. In chapter five, I cited a writer in *Aaj* who, back in 1984, had praised the ability of television to gather the family inside, and by so doing, "save them from the cinema queues". Implicit in such a suggestion was that the known and comforting environment of the house was preferable to the disturbing and predatory outside (cf. Kaviraj 1996). However, as the last two chapters have shown, a joint family may not want to sit down together to watch television and so, although television may save its members from the outside and the cinema queue, what comes inside through the medium of television may be also seen as undesirable. I want therefore to play on the sense in which a television can be seen to represent a new door into the house, a conduit through which external meanings or influence enters it. Meyrowitz's contention that "television...now escorts children across the globe before they even have permission to cross the street" (1985: 238) is entirely suggestive of the dual sense of 'outside' which this chapter employs.

This chapter will therefore consider why parents feel they need to control their children's access to television, and this necessitates a more general discussion of childhood in contemporary India. My account will touch on ideas about playing

and learning, school and adult views on the changed world of childhood. In offering an account of ideas about control in television viewing I therefore seek to draw together some of the connections in the material from the preceding chapters.

Where are the youth of today going?

It became apparent from the very earliest stages of fieldwork that children were a central element in household reactions to satellite television. My conversations about television invariably touched on children, their schoolwork and upbringing, and the ill-effect of television on their studies and their character. Evaluations of television in relation to children were predominantly negative and, at best, ambiguous. The words ‘damage’ (*nuksan*)¹, ‘bad influence’ (*kuprabhav*) and ‘harm’, (*hani* or *karak*) were consistently used. Children were seen to be under the ‘grip’ of a corrupting and highly influential medium. The views found in countless households were consonant with those expressed in the newspaper article cited above. Scanning the newspapers from the time of television’s arrival in Varanasi, I noticed a small story which foretold that the relationship between television and children might well be an uneasy one. Just nine days after Indira Gandhi’s visit to the city a young boy had been electrocuted whilst attaching a television antenna (*Aaj* 4. ix. 84). This was, to be sure, not the danger that most families feared from television, but it intimated that a sense of danger would mark their relationship.

Thirteen years later, the papers continued to contain references to children and television. Reports of seminars addressing the need to educate children properly in the face of threats from television, jostled with complaints about how television had led the youth of today astray. Om Prakash Singh, a local BJP MP, was reported as saying that children need *samskarik* education, because “only this will counter current social trends and build a healthy society” (*Aaj* 11. iii. 97). An angry father wrote to the letters column of *Dainik Jagran* complaining about contemporary advertisements

¹ The word *nuksan* was often used in other contexts to refer to monetary expense, as in “what’s the damage?”. This led me to suspect that when parents talked of television causing ‘damage’ to their children’s study they were referring to money wasted on school fees.

(7. ix. 97). He referred to a well-publicised Thumbs-Up commercial in which a man bungee jumps to catch a bottle of cola. Across North India a spate of ‘copy cat’ deaths occurred; young children tied saris to their ankles and leapt from balconies to their death. An outcry followed and the advertisement was withdrawn.

Children are typically the focus of most moral panics that emerge in the face of new media technologies, and on a comparative basis there is nothing distinctive about the centrality of children in the discourse surrounding satellite television in India. Spigel’s (1990; 1992) account of television in 1950s America details the concerns of adults who regarded television as having the power to cause passivity and violence in children, to disturb their minds and their ability to study. In Britain, the landmark study of Himmelweit *et al.* (1958) was commissioned because of the fear that television would affect children in a very similar range of ways. Two bibliographies list over two thousand academic studies on television and children from a much more recent period (Meyer 1979; Muller 1985), and concern about children continues to punctuate popular commentary on television². It is therefore little surprise that a small Varanasi newspaper *Rambha* (17-24. viii. 97) should report that:

From watching more television and playing video games the number of cases of epilepsy in children has greatly increased... Dr. Ashok Uppal, head of the muscle control department at Amritsar medical college reports that since the innumerable satellite channels began, children watch much more television than they did before. Because they spend hours sitting in front of the television the number of cases of epilepsy in children has increased. This was the case in Western countries too, but now in India also such cases are beginning to come to light³.

Alarm about the effect of television on children in Varanasi mirrors that of an earlier period in the development of television in the West and therefore should not be seen as unique. However, children in contemporary Varanasi are the first cohort growing up in a multi-channel environment, and the concerns that parents recount represent more than the repetition of a cross-cultural knee-jerk reaction. The discourse about television and children in Varanasi provides a framework through which specific

² “*TV a threat to toddlers, doctors say*. Younger children should be limited to two hours viewing a day”, in *The Times* (5. viii. 99).

³ Large’s (1980) book, written in strong opposition to television, cites British research on the question of epilepsy caused by viewing (cf. p130).

ideas about cultural change (and degeneration) are explicated. As I argue later, although the concerns parents express about the malign influence of television on their children are very real, they can be read less literally as commentaries on the current cultural and socio-economic environment.

As I will show in this chapter, some of the ambiguities about cultural change and the present socio-economic environment are played out through children. Children represent a highly versatile means through which such debate can be substantiated and given voice. There is nothing unique about India in this respect, and I will attempt to show that children assume this position because ideas about childhood often involve a teleological assumption; they assume a final moral and ontological status towards which children should develop.

I will also argue, after Wilk (1993: 237), that satellite television provides a “temporal fix” which creates a past and present at dissonance with each other. Notwithstanding the pre-satellite criticisms of those such as Gupta (1988), contemporary satellite television is pinpointed as underlying contemporary decline and degeneration. In short, satellite television has become central to a discourse of nostalgia in which the nature of culture, and young people, are judged. Television leads parents to invoke a mythical, culturally pure past against which the declining present and degenerate future can be projected. Children, representing both present and future, are central to a discourse which rotates around two issues: what is being transmitted by television, and what ability does this have to hinder the appropriate socialisation of children?

This discourse of nostalgia was typified by a local newspaper, written for adults and their children. The editorial of the third edition of *The Children's Times*⁴ offered the following comments on the changed cultural landscape of the present:

⁴ *The Children's Times*, like many of the numerous small newspapers in Varanasi, is far from a mass-circulation publication. I chanced upon this particular copy, and located only one more edition. Its editor suggested its circulation was in the region of one thousand.

Dear Companions. How the children of today are less innocent than they were in a previous age; their world and its atmosphere has changed. Once upon a time, stories were inhabited by kings and queens, ghosts and fairies and there was no television, no video games, no television channels. There were neither robots nor cinema nor battery powered electronic games. Then, in children's dreams came more types of characters and their imagination and their dreams were different, their dreams were not so colourful and there were no fearsome or exciting things. At that time, colour was not so cheap and plentiful and there was no sound of supersonic aeroplanes. There were no men on earth daring to cross space and search for people on other planets. Today, children are their own heroes in their dreams and in the adventures of their mind. Children prepare the material for their dreams because no one knows more about children than themselves. Through the medium of *Children's Times* we are trying to prepare the ground for such children (August 1997).

This statement is pure nostalgia but it should not, for this reason, be dismissed. It is a distilled and lyrical version of what many adults would tell me in other contexts. Both types of account construct a mythical past, a monochrome country of simplicity and virtues in which parents could exert control over the lives of their offspring. Children, in this editorial, are not only regarded as more technologically literate than their parents, they are also seen as more literate in the vocabulary of a culture that is foreign to the household. One theme that underlies this editorial is the sense that children bridge the past and future, tradition and innovation, but that they are also culturally innovative and responsive to new ways. Therefore, children become the site of a debate over cultural transmission because the future is seen to lie in their hands, but it is in their hands that this future is most insecure. The headmaster who edited this paper also airs the possibility that because no one knows children as they know themselves, they might be growing apart from the world of adults but also becoming differentiated themselves. With a view to exploring some of these ideas in more detail it is now necessary to meet some families, and their children, and the concerns that guide their relationship with television.

Children in front of the television.

Sushila, a mother living in the Shivam complex apartment block, expressed in a telling way the difficulties that some parents face in controlling their children in front of the television. Sushila complained that she was barely allowed to touch the television and remarked that her son, Montu⁵, could lie on the couch and switch channels or adjust the volume with his feet, without removing his eyes from the screen. "If he can operate the television set without his hands or eyes", Sushila asked, "how can *I* possibly stop him from watching?" The technological dexterity of children is such that mothers like Sushila feel unequal to the task of controlling their children. She felt a large disparity between her ability to control her children in front of the television and their control over the television set. To her, as to many others, this necessitated various modes of supervision, suppression, restraint and constraint.

Montu, it appeared, was usually victorious in these television battles, but not always. His disobedience was often greeted with a beating, after which he was sent to bed. However, Sushila complained that this was not enough to deter him from continually watching television. After a thrashing:

He doesn't watch for a few hours, but then he switches it on again. While he feels the pain of his blows he doesn't watch television, but when the pain's gone, he switches it back on...he obeys only the television.

At this point Sushila's husband joined our conversation, defending his wife's expressions of concern.

When there was a [cable] strike, the children gave their mother such trouble, *they* phoned the cable operator, asked him why there were no programmes, when would the programmes come again. The problem was the children just could not accept that there was no television [i.e., that there was only DD].

⁵ This was his house (*ghar ka nam*) or nickname. Many children have a house name such as this which is used at home and by intimates. It may be superseded by the other name when the child goes to school. The names are derived from, amongst others things, physical characteristics, the first sounds a baby makes or from a Hindi film character. Nowadays it seems cartoons may influence the choice of a *ghar ka nam*: Montu's sister was known as Minny (cf. Vatuk 1982: 75).

Many households have formal or informal rules for controlling their children in front of the set⁶. These rules might include a moratorium on television before homework is completed, or past a certain time at night. They might be relaxed at the weekend or during the holidays, be lifted for good behaviour or, under duress, when children are particularly persuasive about their need to watch a programme. Other families instruct a servant to watch over a child who is watching, or if they have a new television, use the 'child lock' to block out the prohibited channels.

Other households expressed a sense of satisfaction that their children were able to police their own viewing, and that in their household there was 'freedom' (*azaadi* or *swatantra*) in front of the set. Those with such televisual freedom said that their children knew what and how much to watch, and when television should be set aside for more pressing (and beneficial) pursuits such as schoolwork. Of course, such freedom is also granted to children with an ability to deceive their parents into believing that they watch only that which is 'proper'. The word *swatantra* literally mean self (*swa*) control (*tantra*), but whilst parents may consider their children able to control their viewing, the children may interpret it as freedom to watch what they want. Those who actively supervise their children's viewing suggest that those who do not lack moral fibre, and risk letting their children become spoilt. The fact that some families have neither the time, energy nor inclination to watch over their children in front of the set is interpreted by others as a sign of moral weakness. Those who controlled their children's viewing, or who had not taken a cable connection were, according to advocates of *laissez faire*, backward or simply too incredulous to watch without being swept away by what they saw.

All those who seek to control what, and how much, is watched do so on the understanding that television can spoil (*bigarna*) children if they watch too much or watch the wrong things. By 'spoil', elders suggest a number of negative characteristics: that children 'imbibe' (a frequently used English word) a foreign and

⁶ A very useful comparative perspective from China can be found in Zhao (1996). She notes a similar imposition of rules and identifies comparable ideas that underlie them to those discussed here. The analysis points to the connection between economic changes, state dictates about family size and the consequent pressures on children.

inferior culture, grow up too fast, and learn about things which they cannot, and should not, understand. The extent to which control is required depends on the age, gender, and educational status of a child.

An episode which reminded the Mishra family of the need to supervise what their children watched was recounted by Mausiji. She told how, unbeknown to her, her grandchildren had picked up a popular song from a music channel. One morning the troupe of girls, none older than twelve years, began to sing a song from the roof of the house. No non-kin or passers-by were present or in earshot for which Mausiji was thankful, because the children were unwittingly declaring that they were pregnant. The title and lyrics of the hit song, *Meri pav bhari ho gaya*⁷, 'Oh, my legs have become heavy', resounded across the roof tops, until the adults of the houses caught wind of what was happening, ordered the girls down and sharply reprimanded them. Mausiji could see the funny side, but thought it was wholly inappropriate for these young girls to be singing such a song.

Mausiji's favoured object of criticism on television was the dancing girls on the numerous television shows which feature popular Hindi films or clips from them, packaged between gossip from the steamy world of Bollywood. She singled out the provocative, pelvis-gyrating dancing, which was deftly mimicked by her grandchildren. She would repeatedly tell them not to dance like those *besharm* women, telling them that it was *gandi*, dirty or more strongly *harami*, wicked.

Mausiji noted that it was difficult to explain to the girls why they must not sing such songs and why, at their age, they must not watch too many films, without precipitating the need for further explanations. These children were too young to have the allusion of 'heavy legs' explained because they were not ready to be told about sexual reproduction. Mausiji, herself referring to sexual matters by allusion, noted that "here [in India] the boy-girl thing is kept very quiet...but the problem is

⁷ Jeffery *et al* (1989: 72) note that this euphemism is deployed by women to refer to their, or other's pregnancy in an acceptable way, one that is not a matter of shame (*sharm ki baat*). This said, children employing the phrase can still, as I make clear, embarrass others.

that watching television children get caught up in it all”; they find out about things from television which, in the opinion of the parents, they are not ready to learn.

While many television programmes cause adults distress about children becoming spoilt or corrupted, in other ways television is seen to conflict with the temporal order of the household and the need for schoolwork to be satisfactorily completed. Many favourite children’s programmes are scheduled late afternoon or early evening, when parents wish their children to be home, concentrating on their homework or having their evening food. Such is the attraction (and choice) of television that, as Mrs Khanna in Sampurnanand colony put it, “children *nowadays* run home from school, they know that this or that serial is about to start”.

In point of fact, children from such comfortable households rarely run home, but instead are taken to and from school by rickshaw or bus. Although they may try to run, the weighty book-filled school bags under which they stoop are symbolic of the pressures which most middle class parents acknowledge are part of growing up in contemporary India. In the context of increased competition for places at schools⁸ in the city, the heavy onus on English coaching and revision courses and the mounting importance of examinations, schoolwork is paramount for any self-respecting or ambitious family. It is hard to overstate the importance that is attached to schooling and many parents openly admit to feelings of guilt about the pressures they put on their children, and the exacting standards expected of them. This means that for many households where children are still at school, cable connections are foregone in favour of strict work regimes.

Everyone knows that we haven’t taken cable because of study.

We haven’t taken it [cable]...the children are studying, it’s very disturbing.

Cable? No. How would the children’s study happen? They would always be sitting in front of it.

⁸ Kapur describes this situation well: “Schools are the choosers and parents and children go as supplicants” (1998: 395).

Such comments suggest that cable television is often regarded as more than unhelpful in a child's education. It may be noted in passing therefore that many parents themselves are willing to go without satellite television so that their children's study can take precedence. Cable operators are quite happy to connect houses in the holidays and disconnect them when term begins. They too have children and know that in the current educational and employment environment, satellite television cannot impinge too far into schoolwork. The implementation of the Mandal commission report⁹ has created an atmosphere of considerable anxiety. School education leads the way to college entrance, good employment, excellent marriage prospects and the socio-economic advance of the family. The possibility that a family can "move forward" (as Keshav put it) in the future is a responsibility that lies in the hands of children.

If the pattern of cable television provision to households often mirrors the school year, children's access to television during the week is often similarly moulded around the demands of homework. Mrs Khanna explained that she did not outlaw television viewing in after school hours, but rather ensured that it was carefully monitored by *dadi ma* (HM). However, come the weekend the children are rewarded, the television is not turned off so rapidly and abruptly:

Now the children are going to the school in the morning so we turn the television off (literally *bhujā deta hai*, we extinguish it), but then if it is Saturday or Sunday we give them a free rein (*dil de dete hai*), we give them some slack (*chut dete hai*).

Her use of the word 'extinguish' is quite rare in this context¹⁰, it is usually employed with reference to a fire and in this sense it is a forceful way of phrasing it. Yet the

⁹ The Mandal commission, which reported in 1982 and whose recommendations were implemented by VP Singh in 1990, required that 27 per cent of all jobs under direct control or the influence of the central government be reserved for backward castes. This raised the total of reserved positions, including those of scheduled castes and tribes, to nearly 50 per cent (cf. Brass 1990). In Varanasi, which has a considerable high-caste population, the force of these changes has been felt by large numbers of people. The upshot is scarcer employment opportunities for them and enmity for those included within the quota. During my fieldwork, in many different social arenas, discussions about education and employment centred on Mandal.

¹⁰ Dr Bina Mishra, personal communication.

expressions which I have glossed as 'giving some slack' and 'giving a free rein' are usually employed in the world of kite flying, a well developed activity across the city and north India generally. They mean, literally, 'letting out the string' but used here relate a sense of freedom, of loosened controls. The use of an expression from the world of kiting acts as a significant commentary on the way children, like their kites, simultaneously need control and freedom. Reined in too hard or allowed too much licence, children, like their kites, will not attain any height. The apparent ease with which children fly their kites, and the dexterity and deftness needed to do this, further mirrors the difficult balance that parents have to strike when allowing or denying their children access to television. The reference to kites and children reminds us of the difficulties of raising children, for which there are two contradictory requirements: expressivity and restriction. Given that such families acknowledge that channels like Discovery or National Geographic can be highly educational, but that others are less salubrious, a delicate balancing act is required.

Kiting is an outdoor activity that children love, and it dominates their spare time (and the skyline) in the cooler and windier months of the year. However, it is often regarded as a rather dangerous sport, and each year there are a small number of newspaper reports that children have fallen to their death from the roof tops where they were playing. Although such deaths are few and far between, and although parents recognise the small dangers that kiting may involve, most show pleasure that their children want to play outside where they can get some sun (*doop khana*) and air (*hawa lena*). It is regarded as a wholesome activity which nurtures a sense of competition and friendly rivalry between children¹¹.

Sushila, bemoaning the fact that her son Montu was a 'television specimen' (*television ka namuna*), said that it was a shame that the pleasures of playing outside held no interest for him. In Shivam apartments, children could always be seen racing around the compound on improvised vehicles, roller-skates, playing cricket and badminton,

¹¹Kites are not simply flown. The paper kites are attached to a fine, glass coated line and flown into the airspace of another. When the lines are engaged the flyers attempt to sever the line of the other. When one kite floats away children follow with an eye to capturing it. The accidents usually involve children who are chasing kites with undue attention.

or energetically teasing raucous armies of monkeys. Montu, she said, could be only very rarely coaxed into joining his peers outside, "he cannot turn off the television, he will obey whatever it says". While there is more than a trace of nostalgia in parental discourse that laments the passing of traditional games, such comments do reiterate the belief that healthy, well nourished children 'take air' and do not spend every non-school hour as slaves to the television.

What these concerns indicate is that ideas about the body are crucial in the development of healthy children, but as Alter (1992; 1993a & b) has shown, a healthy body is more than a physically tuned corporeal entity. The dietary and physical regimen of wrestlers at their clubs (*akhara*s) in Varanasi is concerned to produce highly moral physical and social persons, capable of withstanding the degenerative forces of contemporary existence. However, these ideas are not restricted to dedicated wrestling enthusiasts and permeate much everyday discourse about children and their ability to stand firmly against malign influence. The elder generation of males at Kali's tea shop often noted how young men used mirrors to check their hair, whilst in the past they had inspected their muscles. This shift in attention, they lamented, signalled a concern with exterior appearance not inner values and symbolised a general weakness permeating the minds and bodies of the young generation.

Indian children and childhoods

Thus far I have outlined some of the structural elements which frame parents' concerns about their children's television viewing; the highly competitive and burdensome nature of schooling, an economy of scarcity and the commercialisation of television. I have also recounted the widespread and shared nature of ideas about the need to control viewing and have argued that children are central to the cultural discourse which surrounds satellite television. However, more comment on children and childhoods is now required.

The study of childhood and children remains caught in a paradoxical position. Since Aries's (1962) mould-breaking history of the idea of childhood in Western Europe it has been accepted that childhood is a social construction that varies both historically and cross-culturally. However, with this acceptance of cross-cultural variability comes the recognition that the dominance of Western conceptualisations of childhood conceals the cultural variability of childhood (James and Prout 1990: 9). Or, as Jenks puts it, whatever differences there may be between children and their experiences of childhood "children themselves remain enmeshed in the forced commonality of an ideological discourse of childhood" (1996: 122). The sense that childhood differs cross-culturally is suppressed by the dominance of Western ideas about what childhood and children are like.

What Jenks's comment also identifies is the fact that children have tended to represent, in the words of Hardman, a "muted group" (in James and Prout 1990: 7). Like women before them, social research has not been marked by their absence so much as their silence. Their voices have been missing. In the language of South Asian studies they are akin to the subalterns whose voices have only recently been resurrected from the annals of history. Moreover, in the sociology and anthropology of South Asia, children have tended to be silent but also largely absent. Seymour's recent book (1999), discussed below, is one of the few works that deals with the issues of children and their upbringing in India.

As James and Prout (1990) argue, whatever way children are conceived their experiences, behaviour or activities are mostly seen in terms of the adult world, not their own terms. Although new research and theoretical perspectives seek to rectify this problem I must admit that for two reasons I want to exploit this muteness of children, for my own analytic purposes.

There is, firstly, the question of material. James and Prout (*ibid.*) identify ethnography as crucial to restoring the voice of children, allowing their experiences of childhood to emerge. Whilst endorsing this objective I find myself without the material that such an approach demands. My observations and comments were, by default, collected through and from adults. I rarely sought the opinion of children on

these issues, and thereby subscribed to the adult perspective which informs most social research.

The second reason is that now, and during research, I was eager to examine adult reaction to television as it involved children. This may obscure the fact that children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes, but are themselves agents. However, it has the benefit of illuminating the ground of social control (Jenks 1996: 80) which adults assert over children. In other words, parents' ideas about children in front of the television represent significant commentaries on ideas about adult society and its values, and the process of socialisation. This is the focus of this chapter, but before enlarging on these ideas it is first necessary to retrace some ground.

Aries's 'Centuries of Childhood' (1962) has been highly influential in casting ideas about childhood within an historical light, and this has, as I noted above, led to the widespread recognition that childhood is a social construct. His thesis, which refers primarily to France, is that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist" (ibid.: 125). Through an examination of artistic representations he shows that children were not depicted as children but as miniature adults. This suggests, he argues, not that biologically immature people did not exist but that their status was not established in terms of age or physical maturity. In the fifteenth century, children began to appear in the art of Western Europe which reflected, he suggests, their gradual separation from the world of adults. Attitudes towards children were changing which corresponded with an awareness of the particular nature of childhood. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, primarily amongst the economic elite, the 'pampering' of children began, and this treatment of children filtered down the social ladder. By the eighteenth century, the 'modern' conception of the (Western) child had been born. Whereas previously the lives, roles, clothes and leisures of children had barely differed from those of adults, children and adults each enjoyed a different status. Aries does not attribute a single cause to this sea-change and life expectancy, mortality rates, and the development of formal schooling over extensive periods, all feature in his account.

Whilst his study of childhood has provided a paradigm in locating children and ideas about childhood in historical and cultural terms, it has also been questioned, notably by Pollock.

Many...have subscribed to the mistaken belief that if a past society did not possess the contemporary Western concept of childhood, then the society has no such concept...Why should past societies have regarded children in the same ways as Western society today?...If children were regarded differently in the past, this does not mean that they were not regarded as children (cited in James and Prout 1990: 17).

This criticism of the hegemony of Western ideas about children is important. However, the 'new paradigm' outlined by Prout and James (1990) identifies the need for a further recognition. This not just that children's voices should emerge in accounts about them but that childhood should be approached in more pluralistic terms. Questions about childhood, they advise, might be better framed in terms of childhoods.

The 'new paradigm' contends that within any apparently unitary cultural context ideas about childhood, and the experiences of children, are likely to differ substantially. Few writers would claim that adults across a 'unitary' cultural space were the same. Mortality rates, life expectancy, family organisation, kinship, rural and urban differences, farming techniques, land tenure, education, class, caste, ethnicity, and gender are factors which would be called to account in discussions of adult life. They are also important in guiding discussions about childhoods (cf. James and Prout 1990: 8-9).

My experience during fieldwork reiterated to me the likely differences in the experience of children in a single city, or sections of it. I was always keenly aware of the different lives of children in Varanasi. At a municipal refuse dump near my house, children in ragged clothes holding younger siblings would help their parents pick out and sort various types of rubbish. Streaming past in buses or on overloaded rickshaws, would come smartly dressed schoolchildren, in neat blue uniforms. At Kali's tea shop, the owner's youngest son would spend his days surrounded by adult men, or youths raucously discussing the secrets of the male adult world they grew ever closer to. His world was very different from that of the children whose journeys

to and from school were as pampered and supervised as their long passage from childhood to adulthood. In this cultural setting, childhood should be seen as a luxury which not all parents can afford to allow their children to enjoy. Some have to cut short study to supplement their family's income, others never attend school in the first instance.

Clearly profound differences in the experiences of children, and the expectations of their parents, can be assumed in Varanasi, and only a few of the factors listed above have been applied. As Seymour's work implies, if we consider the experiences of male and female children in north India, another level of distinction is revealed. Although, as she argues, patterns of childcare are unlikely to be different for boys and girls in their early years, between the ages of six and ten 'training' becomes more gender based, particularly for girls in anticipation of their future marriage (1999: 86). For boys, she suggests, childhood is somewhat longer. However, in noting the older age at which people now marry, she suggests that the result is an extended childhood for males and females¹². Increases in the amount families invest in education have also extended the length of 'childhood', although as she notes, poor low status families are likely to invest little in education for either boys or girls (*ibid.*: 170). Class issues cross cut those of gender in determining the nature of childhood.

As my own reflections on children around my locality in Varanasi implied, work as opposed to education means that the progression of some children to adulthood may be a short one. However, as James *et al.* (1997: 137) point out, there is a need to distinguish between assistance and work within the household or on its land, and labour outside of the household. Therefore, as Seymour points out, depending on their gender or the availability of servants, children may be required to 'caretake' younger siblings (1999: 136). Moreover the expectation of young girls may be greater in terms of household chores. Labour outside the house, may or may not be apportioned depending on gender, but more likely on the size of the child and the skills required (*cf.* Banerjee 1979).

¹²Seymour's (1999) book is based on a longitudinal study conducted over thirty years in Bubhaneshwar, Orissa.

It is clear then that we should be talking in terms of childhoods, and be alive to the fact that childhood is as potentially varied as adulthood within any given cultural setting. However, the dominance of socialisation theory can lead any attempt to stress such variability to become entrenched in ideas about a single end point in the development of children. Broadly speaking, socialisation theory views child development in terms of a process where adulthood is moulded onto children by adults. It refers to a process of cultural transmission. From this perspective children emerge as defective adults and truly social only in their potential to 'become', not in their present state. The new paradigm seeks to counter this view arguing that children are social actors who shape, and are shaped, by their social and cultural environment (cf. James and Prout 1990).

Whilst endorsing this view of children as active agents rather than passive subjects, I have already acknowledged that available material limits the extent to which I can constructively offer children's accounts of childhood in Varanasi. However, an approach more firmly embedded within socialisation theory is not without its benefits. My adult centred research allowed me to develop an appreciation of how adults (from various positions in the social landscape) viewed children. The subject of our discussions often, but not always, revolved around television and its ability to disturb the flow of socialisation within the household. Ideas about culture and tradition which were often connected to such television discussions reinforced my impression that many people in Varanasi subscribed to some version of socialisation theory. It is, for this reason, valuable to discuss children and television in these terms.

Socialisation theory, because it presumes a moral and social endpoint towards which children progress, creates the space for actual child development to be seen in terms of success and failure. It provides discursive spaces for moral panics about the ability of technology, or other malign influences, to corrupt this process of cultural transmission. Television in Varanasi is seen in precisely these sorts of terms by adults. It is viewed as a barrier to the successful creation of cultural and social adults from children.

From this perspective the views of children about television and its influence over them, although important, are secondary to the manner in which the child becomes central in debates about cultural influence. Socialisation theory, as the apogee of accounts of children viewed by adults, is academically unfashionable but it does accord with popular ideas about what children are, i.e., pre-social and pre-moral. It is through an engagement with such adult views that more light can be thrown on how adults view television and children. The discourse about satellite television encountered in Varanasi is for this reason in accord with socialisation theory: it assumes a preferred cultural state just as socialisation theory presumes a final and preferred ontological state for children.

Before Doordarshan began to commercialise and thereby surrender control over production, and certainly prior to the advent of satellite television, it was possible to say that the Indian state was *in loco parentis* when it came to the question of television. It exerted control over what type of programme was watched and, by limiting the hours of programming, how much television was watched. At a national and a household level, it no longer controls what, and how much people see. Television is available twenty four hours a day and state control over what is broadcast is minimal. The experiences of parents recounted above suggest that they feel it necessary to re-exert this control. They cannot stop what is being broadcast but they can stop it being watched by their children.

The non-stop television available was held to be a crucial aspect of the satellite regime and parents suggested they needed to re-impose household temporality onto the continuous flow of television. Only then could sufficient time be found for homework. Another critical aspect was that parents suggested that if they did not control their children they would watch programmes which were adult. The result would be, in the language of socialisation theory, that people of a young chronological age would enter the world of adults sooner than their parents thought was healthy.

Much of the concern about content revolves around this sense that most television programmes are adult in nature. In this way, householders express what one

researcher has illustrated through content analysis - that most television in India is adult television: "whilst 40 per cent of the television viewing population are children 2.5 per cent of the broadcasting time (in India) is specifically devoted to children" (Agrawal, cited in Goonesekera 1997: 20). Thus children, when asked, were quick to recount their favourite programmes: *Bewitched* and *I dream of Jeanie*, *Disney Hour*, 'Cartoon', *Zee Horror Show* and films (with fights, *mar-dar ki*). However, their parents remained uncertain whether these programmes were specifically for children or merely scheduled at 'children's times'. *Bewitched* and *I dream of Jeanie*, with their special effects and canned laughter appear to be designed for children. Closer examination by parents led them to suggest that they were rather more adult in orientation, with stories of adulterous relationships and deceitful husbands.

The concerns of Mausiji recounted earlier, about her dislike for her grandchildren watching films and *filmi* shows concord with those of many other household elders. During the time I knew the household they had only one combined cinema trip, to see '*Border*' a film that was by general agreement a 'family film'. The result of having a cable connected television is that innumerable films reach the house daily, and given that few are accredited with the label 'family film', the effect is to bring the 'seedy' world of cinema (minus the crowds and queues) into the house. Meyrowitz's comment about children travelling the world before they are allowed to leave the house can be supplemented by the observation that television brings the world of 'courtesans', flirting and unrestrained emotion into the house too. The space of the household may be a 'safe' space for the consumption of films, but what television brings into the house may be considered disruptive to this family arena. Where young children are present, the need to control their viewing arises.

The sense that emerges from Mausiji's comments is that what adults keep quiet, television makes explicit. What adults know will be understood, and contextualised by children as they grow older, television forces them to confront and question at a much earlier age. It tempts them to run before they can walk. Using the idiom of food consumption, Mausiji explains to the children that watching certain television programmes before they were ready would damage them: "we can eat these sweets [watch these programmes] but you [the children] cannot eat them. If we eat them

there will be benefit but they will damage you". Therefore one element of the concern surrounding satellite television is the fear that children are corrupted by knowledge that they become party to before they are ready for it. From this perspective, television is an adult medium that speaks to children in a voice for which they are not yet ready. So, in one sense children are seen to be entering the adult world before their time. It is to guard against this eventuality, to keep children as children, or to maintain the desired rhythms of socialisation that children need to be controlled in front of the television set.

However, there is a danger in overstating the primacy of television in making adults of children, which would be to portray all children as similar in their liability to be corrupted and their parents similarly concerned about the influence of television. Such concern about early adulthood and disruption of education is something of a luxury. Influences that might cause the 'adultification' (Kapur 1998) of middle class children are to be found in other, low status, economically less secure areas.

Being exposed at an early age to the adult life of brawls, sex, illicit distillation of liquor, and crime - which are typical of slum life in urban India - the slum child grows precocious beyond his years. When the children are old enough to walk, they are treated as adults (Banerjee 1979: 19-20).

What can be read into these ideas of adult influences is the sense that they are both external. They lie outside the house and its sense of morality. Sex, crime, murders and violence might be, as Banerjee claims, a feature of slum life. They are not, as I suggested in chapter five, so alien to Varanasi once the veneer of the 'holy city' has been scratched away. As Mausiji's concerns about cinema, a typical 'outside' activity, suggested, what television can do is bring this outside inside. The following section takes up this issue, whilst referring back to the earlier discussion about children's play. Through this I want to explore the possibility that television and the 'outside' are features of a discourse about the 'adultification' of children. Both represent the unknown, or the unknowable; that which (some) children should not experience, yet.

Children in and out of the house.



Plate 9: 1. Cartoon by *Bhai Sahab* in *Dainik Jagran* (25. iii. 97).

Two men are sitting in front of the television, watching scenes of chaos in the Uttar Pradesh legislature assembly in which chairs, and punches were thrown and women MLAs were forced to take refuge under their desks. In what is quite an accurate omission there are no female viewers present; perhaps they are preparing tea and snacks for the guest? Perhaps they have no interest in watching yet another display of aggressive and counterproductive excitement by their state representatives. As I suggested in chapter five, many women, in common with some men at Kali's tea shop, view politics as a messy, violent and unproductive sphere of activity.

Leaving the room are two boys, whose father is saying to his friend, "I don't allow my children to watch such programmes; I just cannot tolerate such complete ill-discipline". Again there is the sense that politics is an unruly activity from which, as outlined in the preceding section, parents may wish to shield their children until they are capable of understanding or appreciating it. (It could also be argued that this display by the politicians may shatter the restrained and dignified image of adulthood that parents seek to instil in their young.) In the world of the tea shop,

young men are privy to, but not always total participants in, political discussion. In this house their father would rather that they did not watch it at all. Discipline, in this father's estimation, is crucial in the upbringing of children, which is why he is adamant that they must not be allowed to see such displays of ill-discipline.

This cartoon represents, in terms of the world of politics, one parental reaction to what television brings into the homes. Television can therefore be seen to articulate the home and the world. How then is the television as a link between the home and the outside viewed? Chapter five suggested that, as far as women are concerned, local television was viewed in a positive light, bringing the world home for safe viewing free from the unruly, uncomfortable and often violent spaces in which it originated. As far as their children are concerned, parents may give television a rather more uncertain reception.

The early words of *Aaj* had been encouraging: "only television gathers the family together and saves them from the cinema queues". I have shown in the last chapters that families do watch television together, but the gathering is rarely as unproblematic as this prophetic statement suggested it might be. Partly this is so because, as the cartoon depicts, television can bring into the house material which adults would prefer to remain outside the house. In this sense a television represents an additional door to the home which parents have some difficulty keeping shut. It is necessary therefore to consider some of the ambiguous meanings which the outside holds for parents when they consider the welfare of their children.

We have seen that mothers like Sushila are keen to make sure that their children watch some television but also go outside to play. But undermining this desire are the often rather ambivalent and ambiguous evaluations of the outside (*bahar*). It was typical for people to comment that the advantage of television was that children could be kept inside and that they could therefore be accounted for. A widow in Assi, whose television was broken when I happened to speak to her, was troubled by the disturbance that the non-functioning television caused because her children needed entertaining during the holidays, and she did not want them roaming the streets. She needed the television to keep them in the house: "if you want them [your

children] to stay in, then you *must* have a television". For herself, television was less something to be watched, rather a means for watching over children who were watching it (*bachche ko dekhne ke liye*). Children put in front of the television set could be supervised, and the reassurance felt that "they are in *your* house".

Ideas about keeping one's children in "*your* house" are underscored by ideas about them roaming the neighbourhood. We might recall the comments of Mrs Agrawal who had moved away from the old city to Shivam apartments. She was concerned about the unsuitable types of children that her sons and daughters played with, and with the need for their ceaseless supervision. At Shivam, mothers would express their satisfaction that if children were in the compound they were in safe hands, if only those of the *chowkidar* (gateman), whose presence at the entrance to the compound ensured that the space within remained safe. In the labyrinthine alleys of the old city, the gaze of elders cannot extend very far. For many mothers the important question is where, and with whom, their children will play.

Singh, writing about "Parks, Playgrounds and Public Meeting Places" in the city, bemoaned the lack of places for children to play and the general lack of open space in the city centre (1955: 95-6), and with the pressures on space in Varanasi intensifying the situation has not improved since. As the orientational chapter noted, it is the colonies in Varanasi, bastions of middle class existence, which maintain private parks and gardeners to tend them. Elsewhere in the city, parks have undergone a process of plebeianisation similar to that which Kaviraj (1996) outlines. They do not represent to middle class families a space in which children can be allowed to roam at will. Those who live in Shivala, close to the one acre *Ratnakka* Garden (formerly the Silver Jubilee Park), suggested that this was unsuitable as a play area for their children. It is skirted on one side by a municipal rubbish dump and on another by a cycle rickshaw stand. It is a popular place for local men to gather in the evening, particularly Muslims, and not considered an appropriate place to send children to play after school. Indeed, unattended children were notable by their absence from this and similar spaces, though children accompanied by an older brother, father or uncle could always be spotted.

However, in many ways these views about the dangers of letting unsupervised children play outside are resoundingly middle class. For my landlord in Shivala, whose garden provided a secure place for his two daughters to play, there was a sense that his children could be outside but not prone to the menaces outside the garden. Spending large sums on their Convent education and English coaching, he wanted them to avoid excessive contact with Bhojpuri speaking children in the alleys near their house. The fact they were young girls also heavily influenced his ideas about what were, and were not, suitable places for them to play. For other, less upwardly mobile families, the fact that their children played in the adjoining alleys with other children, or spent time swimming and playing down by the Ganga was not an issue of any significant concern. As I have noted, many families cannot afford the luxury of either a school education or letting their children play during the day. Some children may play in the alleys, others may be barred from doing so by their protective parents. Others spend their day collecting paper or plastic from these alleys, or serving tea and mopping tables.

The views of more 'middling' families about where their children play are informed by concerns about who they will play with, and this is very often framed in terms of social class. What emerges in this context is a theme that was discussed in more general terms in chapter three. This is the manner in which evaluations of the outside are shot through with evaluations of the people that inhabit such space in Varanasi. Dr Das' concern about his daughters playing in the alley was framed around their gender. However, it was also linked quite explicitly to notions of education and class status. Social contamination is at stake and control becomes a major issue because not everyone they might play with would enjoy the Convent education they were receiving.

Kapur has written about a waning "common children's culture" (1998: 392), in which middle and low class children in towns and cities both participated on equal terms. The children of servants would, she suggests, have played with their employer's children and their games were informed by themes from "adult life, sports and local cinema" (393). In other words, children from different class backgrounds interacted in a public children's culture that was more or less orientated

towards the world of children. Her argument is essentially twofold: children of differing social standing played together and they did so using a repertoire which was less tied to an exclusively children's world.

Whilst Kapur admits that this interaction between children of different class backgrounds was always limited she suggests that it is now much reduced. Kapur identifies television as central to this shift through its creation of "a global children's culture [which] has intensified the class distinctions among children by introducing themes and objects accessible only to the middle class" (ibid.: 392). The result is, she argues, that children are increasingly differentiated by class. Kapur's paper suggests that the global 'Disney' discourse of contemporary television and the toys and images create distinctions between children. Some have more or less constant access to television, others do not. Likewise some can watch the satellite channels, and the real Superman cartoons, others have to settle for Doordarshan's homegrown *Shaktiman* (powerful one).

I would broadly concur with the television aspect of her argument and by doing so admit that this thesis has not examined in any depth those without television or satellite connections. However, there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that all children's activities are so strictly divided by class as she maintains. In my experience some outdoor activities remain popular with children of all social classes. I would suggest that kite flying in Varanasi represents just one such activity. This said, as I noted above, some mothers worried that because it is highly competitive it can lead to brawls: an unhealthy over-interaction between children. It also has a certain reputation as an activity which 'vagrant' children (*awaaras*) spend too much (wasted) time enjoying.

Moreover I would argue that television is not the only force behind such class differentiation of children and parent's evaluations of others' children. Education and the class standing which parents seek to ensure through their children's education is also an important factor. Ideas about the 'outside' as a space in Varanasi have evolved so that it is increasingly seen in terms of the masses, and therefore unsuitable for children from middle class backgrounds. Television may

feed into this process, but as Kumar (1988) showed, it predated the arrival of television.

The intensity of schoolwork, and the ways in which this is embedded within an ethos of competitiveness and social mobility are also crucial in enhancing strong ideas about one's own children *vis a vis* those of others. It might be argued that children of both middling and low status families are labourers, the former in schools and the latter to support their families (cf. Banerjee 1979; Kapur 1998). But (school) labour in pursuance of mobility is not something parents want to jeopardise with ill-advised activity with street children. The increasing educational pressures on children, combined with clear ideas about what types of social interaction may benefit their development, result in the outside and television being viewed as similarly liable to corrupt them.

In this light, attempts to encourage schoolwork to be performed before television, and parental attempts to turn the television into a "home based teaching machine" (Zhao 1996: 644) may be undone if children are visiting the homes of others and watching (inappropriate) television there.

We did not take our connection immediately. First it was in the houses of all our neighbours. The children would leave their schoolwork [unfinished] and go to these houses to watch it [cable]. I did not like it that they were in other peoples' houses watching cable television, especially because they had not done their work... So I went to a neighbour's house and watched it for three or four days, accepted it and took a connection.

Children are unwilling to be alienated from discussions about television in the playground and streets. Therefore, households without a connection risk losing their children to houses where it is available, and when they are elsewhere their viewing cannot be adequately controlled. Narratives about viewing practice and the decision to take a cable connection reveal that people measure their televisual standards against those of others, especially where they are particularly concerned about the education of their children. Those who were slow to take a connection went to their neighbours houses to "see what it was about", what programmes were available and if what people said about foreign television was accurate. The investigation into cable television at a friend's house would allow people to determine, through

observation and discussion, where the boundaries of suitable and unsuitable were drawn within each others' homes. In the course of discussions it was possible for them to come to conclusions with others as to what is proper for children of a similar age. Then they would be able to conclude that if their children were in 'aunty's' house they would be watching something acceptable, because 'aunty' has the same ideas of what is suitable, her judgement can be trusted.

Television can draw children to others' houses, and it can help keep them within the home; either way it attracts children. This attraction can have negative implications though, as this mother's comments suggest. Satellite television can draw children out of their house and into the homes of those that have taken a connection and then the principal concern is that they will watch programmes outlawed in their own home. On the perceived benefit of supervising one's own children's viewing there is similarity between households. This became most apparent to me when, in the space of a few days, Mangal the rickshaw puller and a wealthy family in Ravindrapuri colony outlined the same benefit of owning a television, rather than one's children watching it elsewhere.

Mangal had said that he felt a sense of shame that his kids had to watch through others' windows or doors, without permission and liable to a clip around the ear. He wanted to provide for his children as others did. More significantly, since he was happy for the children to play on the streets under quite general supervision, he expressed concern that his children would be spoilt if they were to watch programmes which he did not allow them to see at home. The elder male of the household in Ravindrapuri colony, although he had been resistant to satellite television, reasoned that "even if you don't take cable they will find out what's on and watch it somewhere, better that you take it [cable] and teach them about what they see properly". A household suspicious about the utility of satellite television weighed this against the expectation that children will seek out what is forbidden elsewhere.

Conclusions

This chapter began with the reflections of parents about the need to control the quantity and quality of their children's viewing. Alongside these concerns were ideas about the necessity for appropriate television viewing to be complemented by outside exercise as well as schoolwork. At the same time I have been concerned to consider the ways in which an ambivalence about the nature of the 'outside' pervades both these sets of considerations. Parents have fears about the nature of programmes, which are seen as foreign or in some way exogenous to the household. Furthermore parents, particularly when they are more middle class in outlook, do not consider the outside of the house, the streets and alleys, to be an entirely appropriate space for their children to play. In this dual sense, the 'outside', is regarded with some degree of suspicion and fear.

What emerges from this material is the sense of pollution, contamination and therefore of boundaries. Children, sometimes wholly unintentionally, transgress these boundaries and parents try to control or maintain them. Given the attention that I have just paid to the control of children inside and outside the house there is a clear sense in which one boundary can be identified as that between the house and world outside. For reasons concerning schoolwork, social contact with the appropriate types of children, and maintenance of a specific linguistic register, parents attempt to control the boundary between the house and the world. However, television, because it brings the world inside and represents in this way a new door into the home, is a technology that can threaten these boundaries. It creates a certain permeability to the home.

I have shown how television can threaten the informational boundaries that separate childhood from adulthood, and how adults try to re-exert control over these boundaries by controlling what their young watch on television. In this way the actions of parents can be interpreted as the policing of the boundary between adulthood and childhood. It is for this reason that I chose to highlight socialisation theory because it is underpinned by ideas about a structured and orderly progression of children towards adulthood. I sought to highlight adult views about children,

although recent work has stressed the need to incorporate children's voices into such research, because I have wanted to explore the discourses through which children are constituted in the current climate. This climate is one of contradictions in which satellite television conflicts with education which can secure the upward mobility and the rewards this promises.

I have also argued that in this environment children are themselves becoming more highly differentiated. Not just because of television, and the themes and objects it peddles, but because parents feel the need to protect their children from children who are rather more adult, or live more adult lives than their own. In this sense, the process in which, through their different use of public space, populations in Varanasi are becoming differentiated is a process that also profoundly affects children. Indeed, because children are so central to ideas about cultural influence and contagion it is through them that these ideas are most clearly articulated.

I have stressed that from a wider historical and cross-cultural perspective there is nothing unique about the centrality of children in adult discourse about television. Children are often central to the moral panic that accompanies technological change. What is significant in this particular ethnographic context is the symbolic importance that children assume when the recent and rapid change in the television environment has led to more widespread cultural debate about 'Indianness'. Debate about their corruption, and the pollution of their minds and bodies is, in household contexts, a very real concern of their elders. However, from a wider perspective the child is used in a variety of ways to represent key concerns of the cultural debate that satellite television has precipitated.

In chapter seven, I discussed the way in which the Indian female body has become an icon for the modesty and propriety of India, and how women are the ground over which it takes place (cf. Mani 1989). The values of which they are held to be safeguarders became central in the articulation of cultural values. Instead of being viewed as the upholders or repositories of tradition children are seen as essentially vulnerable to corruption. They become the site over which debates about cultural degeneration are framed. Children represent the potential corruptibility of Indian

culture, its vulnerability in the face of an assault by foreign values. It is in this way that the comments of Gupta (1988), with which I began this chapter, were employing children: the error of their ways, the transgressions that they make, can be used as signposts to identify the ideal cultural state. For Gupta this meant eschewing jeans and non-vegetarian food in favour of more Indian clothes and diet.

In another sense, the attempts by households to control the viewing of their children can be seen as representative of a country coming to terms with the rapidly changing medium of television. The reframing of media legislation and the frequent debates in national and sub-national forums centre on one issue: the re-imposition of control by India over what those within its borders watch. The language used in these debates is that of 'corruption', 'pollution' and 'cultural terrorism' which is entirely appropriate because it shows a regard for maintaining and securing boundaries (Foster 1991: 239-40). The members of the committee, whose views were cited in chapter seven, suggested that the 'civilisational integrity' of the country would be endangered if people did not wake up to the damage that television was inflicting on its cultural values. They chose the female body to represent one central aspect of the civilisation, many others used children when their accounts stressed the fact that damage had already been done. The female body is used to represent ideal Indian values. However, the minds and bodies of children represents the effect of polluting attitudes and practices; the result of corruption.

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusions

Some years ago, when the television network was expanded, it seemed as if television would be useful for the betterment of society. An effort was made to install television in every far off region and provide it to every social class. There was the hope that with television's use for the propagation of education, information and healthy education, it would become an agent for the enrichment of our culture. But just the opposite has happened. For some time television has presented viewers with a distorted and unrealistic world which exists neither nearby nor far-off (Gupta 1997).

My account of television began at the time of the expansion of the television network in India, and has progressed towards a discussion of the sort of views expressed by this implacable critic of television. However, I hope that on the way a rather fuller picture of television in Varanasi has emerged, in which its role in the life of the city and some households has been offered. The title of this critic's article, "Television is a vision of which society?", highlights the fact that much of what is seen on television in Varanasi is geographically and morally distant from the world of its viewers. Especially since the arrival of satellite television services, many have been able to argue that television offers images of a 'distorted and unrealistic world'. However, what this writer ignores is the localised perspective that television offers households in Varanasi. My account has tackled both the distant and local aspects of television in Varanasi.

At the outset I emphasised the need to consider technology within the social context of its use. This has the benefit of countering the tendency to see the effects of a technology such as television as preordained and shows that its effects are contingent on how it is employed within any cultural setting. Moreover, it created the space for an analysis of television which has shown how the organisation of the household, or the media environment of the city, have patterned the uses and meanings of television in Varanasi.

Indira Gandhi had several uses for television in mind when she began the expansion of the national network in the 1980s. She saw television as an adhesive to stick together the regions of a disintegrating nation, and as a technology that could simultaneously enhance her visibility, project a modernist image and be employed for developmental objectives. However, the subsequent development of television in India should be viewed in terms of the resolution of the ambiguities that marked its early life. The modernist symbol of the television set, and the pedagogic and developmental tenor of its programmes, sat uneasily together. Concurrent social change in India, notably the growing size and power of the middle class, resulted in television becoming a medium of state entertainment provided within a market structure.

More recent technological development has enabled global satellite services and also precipitated the development of local services. Doordarshan has developed a local and regional programming policy and in Varanasi (and elsewhere) "intimately local" programmes have begun to flourish. As far as an anthropological account of television is concerned, this is of great significance. In describing the mediascape of Varanasi I therefore pursued the connections between households, the life of the city, and media activity within both these settings. Both in relation to household television viewing, and the relationship of television with other media in Varanasi, I have charted the interaction between pre-existing (and changing) social forms and a new technology.

In referring to the social organisation of media in the city, I discussed the practical aspects of their organisation, and stressed that this organisation patterns their use. Watching films at cinemas in Varanasi is, to a large extent, a male activity, but the provision by satellite services of films direct to the home greatly increases women's access to such *filmi* entertainment. In discussing newspapers and the activities that are organised around them, I linked access to newspapers to questions of gender and the spaces of the city. In this way it was possible to explore the activities of newspaper readers in their own terms, but also to draw out some of the ways in which the televising of the events which newspapers report, or the public activities which newspaper readers are involved in, enter the household. I have shown that

and therefore offered a corrective to accounts of the public sphere which have stressed the informational separation of men and women, or of the public and private spheres.

This thesis has discussed in detail public and domestic settings in Varanasi. Although television is a predominantly domestic medium its uses within the household cannot be divorced from the larger question of its uses in, and interactions with, the world outside the house. My discussion of the way in which local television provides the 'nearby' world of the city to households, argued that the uses and implications of such local television must be seen in light of the nature of public space. To the extent that television acts as an articulator of these two domains its reception by men and women is different because their relationships with these domains are different. Therefore, women can claim that local television has increased their access to the world of local politics and events in predominantly male space. Men can claim to enjoy an enhanced sense of publicness and publicity, through the broadcasting of events which ensures their visibility across the city.

Television in Varanasi is both local and global and I have explored this dual facet of it in relation to the geography of the city. I do not claim to have added to the global-local debate to any significant extent. However, in chapter three, in which I orientated the reader to Varanasi, I was concerned to look at the ways in which residents map ideas about culture onto the spaces of the city. I argued that this dialogue about culture and place is representative of larger debates about the value of 'Banarsi' as opposed to foreign ways. Television is one of the mechanisms seen to lie behind this delinking of some residents from Varanasi, and although it is a medium largely watched indoors, it is the spaces of the city which are used to locate residents according to their cultural attachments. The idea of suburb, whatever its dissonance with the flavour of Varanasi, is valuable because it draws together many of the issues which this discussion of geography and identity raised: domesticity, cultural inactivity, isolation, as well as spatial distance from the hub of the city. Tensions between culture and place are at the heart of experiences of modernity in Varanasi and to the extent that globalising television is involved in such dislocations

(and their experience) I have sought to lay emphasis on the 'place' where television is watched: the homes of Varanasi.

When outlining theoretical and practical approaches to the study of television I argued that the social contexts in which media use occurs are an analytic priority because they shape the nature of its use. Current trends in the study of television have moved attention away from the programmes (texts) and stressed that media use is a social practice. Within the household spatial, temporal and socio-organisational features have all been shown to impact significantly on the ways in which television is used by different members of the household.

In particular, family relationships have been shown to be a central element in patterning the viewing of television. This is not a novel point, but there are certain organisational features of the north Indian joint family, particularly the relationships between brothers and their wives, which have been shown as of fundamental importance in patterning the uses of television. Family relationships are a central attribute of many popular television shows, and the nature of these relationships are a dominant feature of everyday reaction to television. In this sense, I have argued for the importance of approaching the *content* of television in terms of the *context* of its use.

For some joint families, which now gather around a single television, avoidance relationships are held in abeyance during television viewing. For many others, additional sets placed in bedrooms allow for the maintenance of such avoidance relationships, and engender a mode of viewing which tends towards household segmentation. In part, therefore, household television viewing reflects the pre-existing social relationships of family members, but in other ways it would seem to allow for the transcendence of these relationships. Television viewing is an activity that both reiterates social relations and allows for changes in the social relations of the joint family.

As my suggestions for anthropological approaches to television argued, it is fruitful to consider television viewing as akin to other household practice, such as eating or cooking. In framing my analysis of television within the joint family, I have provided

the space to consider what parallels might be drawn between these activities, and how they are used by people in thinking about the joint family. The primary parallel that has been drawn is between the hearth (*chulha*) and the television set. Both these objects, and the practices they support, are at the heart of commonsense definitions of what a joint family means and how its member interact. For, as one woman put it, “the joint family has come to mean that everyone sits down in front of the television”. In her estimation the extent to which a household set united a family in front of it made it similar to the shared hearth of a household. However, she noted that watching together was not always possible, because of the types of programmes on satellite channels. Additional sets (usually given in dowry) in bedrooms, like additional hearths, symbolise, and generate, forces of segmentation within the household.

Around these dowry sets a whole series of issues coalesce, and in line with my determination to view television, as an object and medium, in social perspective I have outlined and discussed these issues. Televisions sets are telling components of dowry in contemporary Varanasi, and elsewhere in north India. They can be viewed in terms of prestation in an emergent consumer society, as objects which inform relations between husband and wife and the wife and her affines, and given that shared viewing is often regarded as problematic, in terms of the viewing that they allow or precipitate. Dowry sets in conjugal bedrooms help couples carve out a space of their own in the house, and enable conjugal bonds to be articulated. Dowry sets are not just about watching programmes in the bedroom but inform perspectives on the nature of the joint family; they are a feature of, and a statement about, the nature of the contemporary joint family. By drawing parallels between incoming women who bring sets and their televisions, I suggested that television is not only another, but also the ‘other’ (i.e., affinal) of the family.

My thesis can therefore be read as either an account of the Indian joint family in the television age or an account of television viewing within the joint family. Television watching is a good way to understand family life and by the same token, household life is an essential context for understanding television watching within the home.

The value of pursuing an investigation that simultaneously explores both family life and television is, I hope, borne out by this thesis.

As the Mishra household seemed to realise, the impact of television on family life is a matter of its uses. They preferred to retain a single set and loosen the relationships which mitigated against them all watching it together. Others tell a story in which additional sets allow for more segmented approaches to viewing in their household. Since August 1984, most households in Varanasi have been engaged in an active process of negotiation with their television sets. The title of the thesis, the statement from a woman about her television, strikes at the heart of this ongoing process of accommodation with television by a household, and the manner in which I have treated this process. As an object and as a medium, television is enmeshed within the web of social relationships of the household. As I have shown, access and reaction to the set and its programmes are patterned above all by the gendered, generational and kinship identities of the family members. When the television has become “another member of the family” it has become a socially constituted technology whose role within the family circle has been cast in terms of the social identities enduring within the household.

Of all the members of the family, children are central in any household's accommodation with satellite television. They are symbolic of viewers who are coming to terms with what they often represent as an intrusive and disturbing medium. If, as I suggested, the female body is one site over which the nature of contemporary television is measured or criticised, the child is where the effects of satellite is discursively located. Children, by provoking in adults nostalgic views of the past and concern about the future, occupy a central space in which the nature of culture is debated. However, there is a real dearth of literature on children and childhood in India, and there is plenty of scope for more research on experiences of childhood, beyond work on schooling.

In drawing this study to a close it may be as well to point out other areas of study and unexplored issues that would help produce a clearer picture of television in Varanasi. The most notable omission is that of Muslim households. A study of their uses and

reaction to satellite television would be useful in its own right and for comparative purposes. Moreover, since Varanasi is home to many other communities which have access to programming from their linguistic regions, research on matters of identity in such a television environment would be welcome. A more general omission, which I admitted in the preceding chapter, is analysis of those without television or satellite television who might be considered the information poor of contemporary India. In what I have described as a highly saturated media environment more attention to those falling outside the world of media would create a more balanced picture.

I have noted that the newspaper industry in India is growing at an unprecedented rate, and also shown that local and national coverage of political events and issues is expanding in qualitative and quantitative terms. There is room for more investigation into the relationship between the media and politics in India, from the perspective of tea shops such as Kali's to the broader national stage. This would be valuable in increasing understandings about the generation of public opinion, the nature of political affiliation and the wider issue of political culture.

Towards the end of my stay in Varanasi, in the month of *Kartik* (October-November), women made figures along the ghats from the mud exposed as the Ganga receded. These were of *Bhima*, the God of wind and the father of King Divodasa of Kashi. Next to one a girl had etched out her own figure and was preparing mud with which to make the body. This was especially noticeable because it appeared to me to derive more from Disney than any mythological source, and when I enquired my suspicions were confirmed; it was a giant Mickey Mouse.

I liked this obvious juxtaposition and thought it fitting that a hallowed substance was being moulded into a more novel form by a child of the television age. However, before I had time to return to photograph the artist and her creation, highly unusual

and unseasonal flooding had caused the Ganga to rise almost to street level. Something which had struck me as a telling symbol of cultural change had been washed away in a flash. This episode reminded me that whatever I, or anyone else, thought about television and the nature of change in Varanasi, any conclusions about the permanence of television related change should be made with caution.

Glossary

<i>Adimukta</i>	‘never forsaken’; Varanasi
<i>akhara</i>	wrestling or body-building club
<i>Anandavan</i>	‘forest of bliss’, a name for Varanasi
<i>apna</i>	one’s own; antonym of <i>paraya</i>
<i>azaadi</i>	freedom
<i>bahar</i>	outside
<i>bandhan</i>	lit. ties, also custom, observed practice, link, connection
<i>Ban kati</i>	‘cut forest’
<i>chay</i>	tea
<i>cheer haran</i>	disrobing or stripping of clothes, specifically mythological
<i>Chowk</i>	the central market area in a north Indian town/city
<i>chowkidar</i>	gatekeeper
<i>chulha</i>	hearth
<i>crore</i>	ten million
<i>darshan</i>	auspicious sight
<i>deshi</i>	Indian
<i>dhama</i>	abode of the Gods
<i>dogla</i>	cross-breed, bastard
<i>fayda</i>	benefit
<i>gandi, gandagi</i>	dirty, filth
<i>ghat</i>	steps leading down to a river
<i>ghi</i>	clarified
<i>ghungat</i>	the loose end of the sari, ~ <i>mikalna</i> , to veil with this part of the sari.
<i>goonda</i>	thug, criminal
<i>harami</i>	wicked, bastard
<i>hawelli</i>	mansion
<i>jootha</i>	leftovers, defiled food
<i>katha</i>	oral discourse on a religious topic or theme
<i>Kashi labh</i>	‘the profit of Kashi’; the promise of salvation for those dying in the city

<i>kendra</i>	centre, here transmission relay centre
<i>lajja</i>	shame, synonym of <i>sharm</i>
<i>lakh</i>	one hundred thousand
<i>laukik</i>	popular, as opposed to Sanskritic or textual
<i>Mahashmashama</i>	'the great cremation ground'; Varanasi
<i>mast</i>	carefree, insouciant
<i>math</i>	monastery
<i>mazar</i>	Muslim shrine
<i>mela</i>	fair
<i>mithai</i>	sweets
<i>mohalla</i>	neighbourhood
<i>moksha</i>	salvation or deliverance from <i>samsara</i>
<i>niyam</i>	rule
<i>nuksan</i>	damage
<i>pan</i>	betel leaf, areca nut and assorted condiments
<i>Pancha tirthi</i>	a pilgrimage in Varanasi, containing five stops along the Ganga.
<i>paraya</i>	not one's own, other; antonym of <i>apna</i>
<i>parishkrt</i>	refined style or vocabulary, 'high' (language).
<i>pardah</i>	institution of female exclusion
<i>puri</i>	unleavened bread fried in <i>ghi</i> or oil
<i>Ramcharitmanas</i>	TulsiDas' version of the Valmiki Ramayana
<i>roz roti</i>	lit. daily bread, a living
<i>sadhu</i>	renunciant
<i>samsara</i>	cycle of birth and rebirth
<i>samskar</i>	refinement, one of the sixteen life-cycle rituals that 'make', perfect and refine the body
<i>sanyuktapan</i>	jointness
<i>saptapuri</i>	the seven holy cities of India
<i>sharm</i>	shame, embarrassment, modesty, synonym of <i>lajja</i>
<i>shudh</i>	pure, refined (food, language etc.)

<i>swadeshi</i>	home industry
<i>swatantra</i>	freedom
<i>tirth</i>	place of pilgrimage; 'ford' or crossing place
<i>thundai</i>	a cooling drink made with milk, almonds, pepper, and cream etc.
<i>upnivesh</i>	colony or settlement
<i>zamindar</i>	land-owner
<i>zindagi</i>	life

APPENDIX 1

This letter is a good example of the social commentary which is offered in local newspapers and discussed in tea and *pan* shops. It might be viewed as merely the nostalgic views of an elderly and disenchanted Banarsi. However, it covers themes of degeneration, political double-dealing and 'youth' which are widely debated. Obscured by my deficient translation is the lyric and comic appeal of this missive.

'This is the state of Varanasi'

Here money comes and goes like water. Even in the rainy season youths, wearing tight pants and expensive foam shoes, wander aimlessly in the mud. Parking their car or scooter they sit right in the middle of the road talking to one another. Whether they cause a jam or trouble to others it doesn't trouble them. Talking in the middle of the street is a common thing in this city.

This is a religious city where *lakhs* of travellers come to bathe in the Ganga and worship Baba Viswanath. After bathing they have to walk through muddy rivers to take *darshan*. In Varanasi the *gallis* and streets are blocked with sewage and dirt keeps on flowing, but the sewage tax has been raised by ten times. At the cleaning and repair centres the materials are not available and if there is a pothole in the road at your doorstep, or the man hole cover is broken, then a man will come from the [municipal] corporation but you will have to give him bricks, sand and cement.

What more can you say about the Varanasi roads? If someone is sick and has to go to hospital or a woman needs to go to a nursing home then either the patient will die or the child will be born on the way. In lanes or roads no tube light or bulb have been fitted for years. If you get water or not it makes no difference to the water department but they should have all their taxes every year. *Wah!* Varanasi and its departments.

Varanasi is an ancient religious city and is full of temples. There are battles over having new temples built but no one understands the need to renovate old ones. There is no lack of millionaires in Varanasi but there is no one to serve the poor or take care of the temples. *Lakhs* of rupees are lost on the lottery. Common people are shown a beautiful picture and thieves make people deposit money [in investment schemes] then they swallow it. Those whose money it is, he abuses and he feels no effect.

In Varanasi there was a time when hundreds of bags of silver coins came from Ballia and other places. Then this silver was melted and made into thread which was used in brocades. Varanasi sarees were made from this silver brocade. Now in Varanasi 1 kilo of copper mixed with 3 grammes of silver is used to make silver and gold brocade for weaving sarees. After burning a Rs.1000 sari one will get Rs.10/12 of copper.

Every house has a political leader but they don't worry about the public. They come to the door of the public to ask for votes. Otherwise the public don't meet them. Why? Varanasi and its departments: be it the Municipal Corporation, health or rations. Again and again I want to give my hearty respect to all these departments.

Kailashnath Pandey, Jaitpura.

Printed in the *Janvani* (Voice of the people) column of *Dainik Jagran* (23. vii. 97).

APPENDIX 2

Television in India: a selected chronology

1959

Doordarshan launched.

1961

Educational broadcasts began

1975

6 television centres established nationwide

INSAT launched: satellite and microwave support.

1976

First television commercial.

1980

Doordarshan invites sponsors for programme production.

1982

There were 19 television transmitters covering 26% of the population and reaching 17 million homes.

Colour television introduced on 15th August (Independence Day).

The Asian games (Asiad) provided impetus for relaxation of import restrictions on televisions and technology 'kits' for their production.

A black and white set cost two/three times a middle class salary.

1983

The Indian satellite INSAT 1B was launched for the effective distribution of 'National' programmes across India.

The Special Plan was launched under which the construction of 185 transmitters were planned by the end of 1984.

1984

The 'Special Plan' was in full swing: between March of this year and the following the number of transmitters leapt from 46 to 172.

FSL (a subsidiary of Nestle) began sponsoring *Ham Log* and Maggi noodles were born as a popular product. The era of commercial television and privately produced soap operas began.

August 26th: Indira Gandhi visits Varanasi to inaugurate the 108th Doordarshan relay station. Just over one month later the city watches her cremation in Delhi.

A second DD channel launched for Delhi

1987

There were 197 transmitters covering 70% of the population and reaching 74 million homes.

Raymond Sagar's Ramayana is launched. The telly epic lasted for 87 episodes and was viewed by millions on every available television set. Followed by the Mahabharata.

1990

ASIASAT 1 launched.

1990

December: licence for broadcasting was granted to STAR (Satellite Television Asia Region). The service, including MTV, Prime Sports, BBC and Star Plus began almost immediately.

During the Gulf War, satellite television begins to make an inroad, primarily through CNN, and the BBC on the STAR network

1992

October: Zee TV launched.

1993

January: 3.3 million homes were receiving Star TV.

Rupert Murdoch buys 63.6% of STAR.

A Doordarshan report estimated that 4% of Indian villages had a cable connection.

The Metro entertainment channel launched.

July: Murdoch buys 49.9% of Zee TV.

August 15th: Five satellite channels were launched by DD to compete with the increasingly popular private satellite channels. They were quickly seen as a failure and withdrawn.

1994

January, estimates that there were 100,000 cable operators in India.

August 15th: Major restructuring - DD1-DD13. Regional Language Satellite Services begin from state capitals.

Riots in Bangalore against the broadcast of Urdu on DD.

1995.

DD India launched: DD reaches beyond India with its international channel.

1996.

The former Director General of DD moves to Star TV and begins their Indianisation drive. Hit shows from DD1 follow him to the Star network.

1997

There were 868 transmitters, covering 87% of the population reaching 296 million viewers. There are 57.7 million television homes and DD estimate that a further 152 million people have access to television. Total estimated audience is therefore 448 million with rural viewers accounting for 49.5% of the total.

34 channels are available in Varanasi.

A cable connection costs approximately Rs. 100 per month. Siti Cable estimate that there are 60,000 household connection in the city.

The Doordarshan network:

Channels: 19

Programme production centres: 41

Transmitter: 921

Programme output (hours per week): 1,422

Revenue (1996-7): Rs. 5.73 billion.

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